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AFRICANS, AFRO-AMERICANS AND NARRATIVE CINEMA:
ASPECTS OF THE EVOLUTION OF A VISUAL LITERATURE

by



Edward Kaaya Ismail

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

With African illiteracy ranging between 70 and 90%, and consequently, oral traditions playing a very vital role in African cultures, the literary audience in Africa is virtually "audio-visual." Film, though a novelty to Africans, is surpassed as a form of entertainment only by the continent's craze for soccer.

Since the early degrading portrayals of blacks in Hollywood films, their images in American cinema have undergone an evolution that some call "revolution," yet the new stereotypes of the late 1960's and 1970's are rejected by many progressive Africans.

An historical sketch of black people and film, this thesis examines the reasons for African scepticism about "Afro-American" cinema, illustrates African animosity towards it, and selectively surveys African attempts to supplant it with indigenously produced films. Following a description of significant aesthetic and political differences between Afro-American and African films and American and African cinema industries, a prognosis for African narrative cinema is made.

Since the role of film in the predicaments of contemporary African societies is of major concern here, this thesis takes the form of a socio-critique rather than literary criticism. While the relationship between film and literature is briefly mentioned in the first chapter, the ensuing chapters deal more and more directly

with film as an ideological tool on the one hand, and with the quest for means of building up a genuinely revolutionary African cinema on the other. The implicit assumption that runs throughout the thesis and that is based on an initial examination of existing scholarship on the topic is that careful analysis of the political-economic base of narrative cinema is a necessary prerequisite for useful study of its literary and formal aspects.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I INTRODUCTION: AFRICA, AND FILM AS LITERATURE, WITH BRIEF COMMENTS ON METHODOLOGY, PROCEDURE, AND SOURCES OF MATERIAL	1
1 FILM AS LITERATURE	1
2 A BRIEF COMMENT ON METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE	4
3 SOURCES OF MATERIAL	5
Notes	7
II RACIAL STEREOTYPING: A CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR THE RULING CLASSES	9
Notes	21
III FROM THE ORIGINS OF THE "LIBERAL" BLACK FILMS OF THE 1940'S TO THE BLAXPLOITATION FILMS OF THE 1970'S	23
1 THE 1940'S AND 1950'S	23
2 BLAXPLOITATION: THE LATE 1960'S AND EARLY 1970'S	29

CHAPTER	PAGE
3 BLAXPLOITATION FILMS IN AFRICA:	
THE EXAMPLE OF TANZANIA	34
Notes	39
IV UP FROM AFRO-AMERICAN CINEMA:	
REVOLUTIONARY AFRICAN CINEMA?	42
Notes	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY	75
APPENDIX A: COMMENTS ON TWO FILMS BY SEMBENE OUSMANE:	
<u>MANDABI</u> AND <u>CEDDO</u>	80
APPENDIX B: DRAFT CHARTER OF THE AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR	
CINEMA COOPERATION (KNOWN AS "THE MAPUTO AGREEMENTS")	
AND OTHER MAPUTO DOCUMENTS	88

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: AFRICA, AND FILM AS LITERATURE,
WITH BRIEF COMMENTS ON METHODOLOGY,
PROCEDURE, AND SOURCES OF MATERIAL

1

FILM AS LITERATURE

In the world of European letters, definitions of "literature" have been extended in recent years to include all kinds of para-literature, and it has become acceptable to discuss cinema and literature in such a way that narrative cinema is considered a legitimate object of study by literature scholars. Many film programmes are even housed in literature departments.¹ The close link between the two areas of study can be found even in technical vocabulary. Film scholars now use "cinemate" as an analogous term for "literate."

Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the first literary figures to seize upon the importance of the links between cinema and literature. In his 1948 Qu'est-ce que la littérature, he remarked that the contemporary writer who wanted to have a social impact should turn from the print medium to screen writing. Typical of the statements made by academics who wish to extend literary studies to include film is one by Allardyce Nicolls:

... cinema has achieved a certain measure of perfection and because of its direct appeal to eye and ear, many of

the screen versions [of literary works] have assumed an importance in men's minds even greater than that of the writings from which they sprang. . . . The cinema has demonstrated its ability to tell a story in its own and arresting manner. . . . The film, like the drama, is ever gazing anxiously at a contemporary audience.³

Oddly, Sartre, whose essay "Orphée noir"⁴ is largely responsible for the European awakening to neo-African literature, never considered the importance of cinema as an African literary medium. The first film by an African was a film genre thesis, C'était il y a quatre ans (1955),⁵ by Paulin Soumanou Vieyra. The first African to recognize the importance of film as a literary medium was Ousmane Sembene:

The cinema is in the process of becoming the most important tool for the fertilisation of a new African culture. The role of cinema is especially important in Africa where the majority of the population cannot read or write. Because it is able to enter into direct communication with the African masses, the cinema brings together the essence of African traditional culture which is essentially oral.⁶

Scholars of African literature classify sub-Saharan literatures into two major groups: (1) writings in European languages, comprising "neo-African" or "modern" African literatures, and, (2) literature in indigenous African languages, subdivided into the few substantial written traditions (e.g., Kiswahili, Amharic, and so forth), and the countless oral literary traditions. Sembene, one of the best known African novelists,⁷ extended these classifications by abandoning novel writing for film making, or written literature for visual literature.

Nowhere in scholarly writings on African literature was this link between literature and cinema made until Stephen Arnold's

"Film in Tanzania, I: Literary and Ideological Aspects."⁸ While empirically limited to the Tanzanian scene, the article could, because of the scope of its ideological penetration into neo-colonial culture, be retitled "Imperialist Cinema in Neo-Colonial Africa." However, the sociological thrust of that study never veers fully into the cinema-literature question. The fact is, cinema is the major form of literature in the modern sense that "modern" Africans, the urban masses "read." With illiteracy ranging between seventy and ninety percent in all of Africa's various nations, the literary audience in Africa is primarily oriented toward the visual literature of narrative cinema. (Non-narrative films are almost never shown in Africa.) The UNESCO Statistical Yearbook of 1950 reported that while 44.3% of the world adult population (over 15 years old) was illiterate, African illiteracy was 84.4%, distributed as 90.2% in West Africa, 88.5% in Eastern Africa, 80% in Middle Africa, 83.3% in North Africa, and 58.6% in South Africa. The 1972 Yearbook showed that while world illiteracy had decreased to 34.2%, in 1970, Africa still had 73.7% illiterate adults in its overall population.⁹

The cinema consumed in Africa is mostly produced abroad. This thesis examines the implications of that fact and the attempts of Africans to overcome the limitations imposed by such a situation. As such, this work is a preface to the study of the main modern "literature" on the continent. Before we get to films made in Africa by Africans, we have to examine films made by foreigners about all kinds of topics, but most important for our purposes, about peoples of African descent.

A BRIEF COMMENT ON METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

Historical and contemporary realities of Africa have been shaped by slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Any scholarship on subjects concerning Africa, in order to become relevant, must elevate these facts to a primary concern. Because of this, and for reasons other than scholarly pragmatism, this thesis does not deal with literary or formal aspects of film. It appreciates film only as a social and ideological medium, regarding a study of film from this approach as a necessary preface to useful study of the formal aspects of cinema. The term socio-critique is more appropriate than literary criticism for categorising this work.

Ideological vocabulary used in this thesis might be unfamiliar to some readers. For example, "Western" should describe a non-African, capitalist phenomenon and "Feudal" describes pre-capitalist society. These terms do not describe or distinguish social classes. African traditional culture, although at the moment existing in the shadow of "Western" economic systems, is generally referred to as "feudal."

Class analysis is the key analytical concept in this work. Racial terms: white, black, Afro-American, Negro, and so on, are used solely for descriptive convenience. Although previous scholarship on the subject of black peoples and cinema has also treated relevant films from a social vantage point, most of it has been handicapped by idealism. An insufficient amount of it has taken up a marxist analysis of social conflicts.

Initially I planned a very orderly study of four countries which represent the geographical, linguistic, cultural and historical variety found on the African continent: Algeria (Muslim, Arabic, North African, "revolutionary" soviet satellite, and so forth); Ethiopia (Christian, intense social conflict now in process, East African, soviet satellite); Senegal ("secure" French neo-colony, large film industry, heartland of "négritude" policies, West African, etc.); Tanzania (independent and "socialist," former British "trusteeship," a growing film industry, East African), and their relationships to Afro-American cinema. However, such a project was frustrated because many relevant documents proved to be unobtainable. In spite of this, the mass of documents I consulted revealed a pattern that allowed me to make definite conclusions about cinema in Africa, allowing me to consider it on many levels: governmental involvement in international agreements, laissez-faire situations, inter-continental arrangements, intra-continental movements (Pan-African initiative, social-class aspects), and, most significantly, independent individual film-makers. What results is a broad--and as well-documented as possible--thesis on the general topic rather than a compartmentalized breakdown of separate national film situations. The study of the latter would be formidably difficult and more appropriate for a Ph.D. dissertation.

SOURCES OF MATERIAL

The library of the University of Alberta, in which I did most of the work, is rather "young" on this particular topic--books on

African film are extremely limited. I had to rely almost entirely on periodicals--but again, the library lacks even the most important one, Cinéaste.

Through correspondence with the Ethiopian film-maker and Professor at Howard University, Haile Gerima, I managed to obtain a number of photocopies of articles on African films from various periodicals, including Cinéaste. However, most of the material was unidentifiable as to its authorship, date of publication, and so forth. For example, there was one very useful article entitled "Smashing the Myth of the Noble Savage," which I was completely unable to identify beyond the title.

As for the bibliography with which I started this work, I had to use some unorthodox procedures: at the library of Indiana University, I got hold of Carrie Moore's thesis on the "Works of Ousmane Sembene" (the most prominent African film-maker), and swiftly copied its bibliography. I have had to do without some of the material as the Inter-Library Loan services, upon which I have relied, were, in spite of exhaustive, generous efforts of their staff, not always successful in obtaining what I needed.

A working séjour in California netted me further material and conversations with both Afro-American film workers (e.g., Brock Peters, Sidney Poitier, and Beah Richards), and African ones (e.g., Ousmane Sembene, Paulin Vierya, Mahama Traore and Teshome Gabriel). In spite of all my efforts I caution the reader that I am presenting a study of a young and as yet poorly developed field in the scholarly sense, and feel I have only approximated truth, not grasped it.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

¹ Linda Beath's A Guide to Film Courses in Canadian Universities, 1971-1972 (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1973), indicates that of over eighty film studies programs in Canadian post-secondary institutions, more than half are housed in literature and language departments.

² There is a variety of books and articles in scholarly journals that could be cited as major contributions to this field. The books would include: William Jenk's The Celluloid Literature (1971), Robert Richardson's Literature and Film (1961), Geoffrey Atheling Wagner's The Novel and the Cinema (1975), Lewis Jacobs' The Emergence of Film as Art (1969), and Rudolf Arnheim's Film as Art (1967). For periodical scholarship on this subject, the essential starting point is John and Lana Gerlach's bibliography: The Critical Index: A Bibliography of Articles on Film in English, 1946-1973, Arranged by Names and Topics (1974). Among the articles included in the compilation, I find the following to be particularly instructive on the subject: Hollis Alpert's "Movies Are Better Than the Stage," Saturday Review, 38 (1955), pp. 7-8, Jean Debrix's "Cinema and Poetry," Yale French Studies, 17 (1967), pp. 86-104, Stanley Kauffman's "End of an Inferiority Complex," The Arts, 46 (1962), pp. 67-70, Stephen Koch's "Fiction and Film: A Search for New Sources," Saturday Review, 52 (1969), pp. 12-14, Edith Laurie's "Film the Rival of Theatre," Film Comment, 1 (1963), pp. 51-53, Frank McConnell's "Film and Writing: The Political Dimension," Massachusetts Review, 13 (1972), pp. 543-562, Bernard Pingaud's "The Aquarium," Sight and Sound, 32 (1963), pp. 136-139, Evelyn T. Ricoman's "Film and Fiction," Antioch Review, 17 (1957), pp. 353-363, and Edward Ruhe's "Film: The Literary Approach," Literature Film Quarterly, 1 (1973), pp. 76-83.

Both the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) and the French VII and XX bibliographies have cinema sections. A survey of the articles in these volumes, however, indicates that the French are more interested in cinema as cinema and less in its distinctness from and similarities to literature. With rare exceptions like Jean Chalon's "Ces Jeunes Auteurs de vingt-cinq ans qui préfèrent le cinéma à la littérature," Figaro Littéraire, 1411 (2 juin 1973), V, 17, most of the articles deal with the art of cinema in a specialised way. Typical of the articles are: Magny, Joël, "Vers un nouveau cinéma français," Téléciné, 180 (1973), pp. 2-8, and Soudet, Pierre, "Censure et cinéma, une page tournée," Express, 1226 (5-11 février 1973), p. 45. Semioticians (who baffle me) are based in France and

they make few distinctions between film and literature. Whatever they do, they do equally mysteriously with film and literature. Semiotics is not something taken seriously by African intellectuals except, perhaps, by Sunday Anozie (see his Sociologie du roman, which deals exclusively with print literature).

³ Allardyce Nicolls, "Literature and the Film," English Journal, 26 (1937), p. 2.

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée noir," Situations III (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), pp. 229-286.

⁵ See Senegal: Fifteen Years of an African Cinema, 1962-1977 (February 2-March 5, 1978), p. 7.

⁶ Ousmane Sembene, "Film-Makers and African Culture," Africa, 71 (1977), p. 80.

Though the question of soundtrack language is not considered in this thesis, it is interesting to note that hundreds of semi-literate people in Dar-es-Salaam who have no cars and who know next to no English walk long distances to sit and watch Drive-In films every night.

⁷ Sembene's novels include Le Docker noir (1956), O Pays, mon beau peuple (1957), Les Bouts de bois de Dieu (1960), L'Harmattan (1963), Le Mandat et Vehi Ciosane (1964), and Xala (1965).

⁸ UMMA, 6 (1976), pp. 21-25. The article appears in revised form as chapter one of The Cinema in Tanzania: The Treadmill beside the Road of Self-Reliance (Dar-es-Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1979).

⁹ See UNESCO Statistical Yearbooks of 1950 and 1972.

CHAPTER II
RACIAL STEREOTYPING: A CULTURAL
STRATEGY FOR THE RULING CLASSES

Film, unlike other art forms, has always been a big capital investment industry. It is the only major art form to be produced by the bourgeois classes, and except for very few exceptions, has never escaped their domination. As a propaganda medium, film is universally accepted to be the most powerful of agents. Since its earliest beginnings in the late nineteenth century, it has, through employment of various racial stereotypes, continued to portray the peoples of African descent in a way which is calculated to justify enslavement, colonialism and economic exploitation. While on the one hand this chapter will endeavor to give the reader a brief account of the treatment of the black man in films, its main purpose is to convert the often prevalent idealistic tendencies which have been exhibited by most black film critics and scholars whenever they have addressed themselves to the question of the evolution of the black man in films.

Serious scholarly attention to the subject of black racial stereotypes in films starts with the 1945 publication of The Negro in Films by the British film critic, Peter Noble. With enormous sympathy, Noble's book traces the treatment of the blacks in films from the 1902 silent production, Off to Bloomingdale Asylum, by the

French film pioneer George Méliès, up to the motion pictures of the post-World War II period. In 1950, V.J. Jerome's The Negro in Hollywood was published. Jerome, then chairman of the U.S. Communist Party's National Cultural Commission, foresaw a perpetuation of the oppression of the black people in the newly emerging film stereotypes. Prior to the 1970's, apart from numerous articles and reviews in periodicals such as Crisis, New Republic, New Masses, Our World, Ebony, etc.,¹ and apart from sketchy comments in several other publications on the motion picture industry, Noble's and Jerome's books remain the only major publications addressed specifically to the question of black stereotypes.

In the 1970's, undoubtedly following the boom of black films which started in the late 1960's, publications on the subject have picked up an ever increasing momentum. In 1972, Edward Mapp's Blacks in American Films: Today and Yesterday came out. Mapp attempted to trace the evolution and portrayal of black people in American motion pictures within the context of black American social and political dynamics. James P. Murray examined the development and establishment of black cinema in his To Find an Image: Black Films from Uncle Tom to Superfly, which appeared in 1973. The Black Man on Films: Racial Stereotypes was edited by Richard Maynard and published in 1974. In 1975, three major publications appeared: Lindsay Patterson's Black Films and Film-Makers, Jim Pines' Blacks in Films, and Donald Bogle's Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks. While Patterson's book is an anthology of articles and writings on black films from the earliest stereotypes to the black "super heroes" of the 1970's, Pines

surveys racial themes and images in American films and Bogles explores the five basic stereotypes present throughout black film history.

In an article on the subject, published in 1944, Dr. Lawrence D. Reddick noted nineteen basic stereotypes of blacks in American society. Rampant in films, they ran as follows:

1. the savage African
2. the happy slave
3. the devoted servant
4. the corrupt politician
5. the irresponsible citizen
6. the petty thief
7. the social delinquent
8. the vicious criminal
9. the sexual superman
10. the superior athlete
11. the unhappy non-white
12. the natural-born musician
13. the natural-born cook
14. the perfect entertainer
15. the superstitious churchgoer
16. the chicken and watermelon eater
17. the razor and knife "toter"
18. the uninhibited exhibitionist
19. the mental inferior.²

Right from the beginning of the film process up to the World War II period, there was not a single portrayal of the black man in American films which did not entail at least one of the above stereotypes. Up to 1915, when D.W. Griffiths' utterly vicious film, The Birth of a Nation, appeared, there was a general tendency towards comedy, simply depicting grotesque images of black life in the most comical ways. "Ethnic" events such as water-melon eating contests, buck dancing and cake-walking were dramatised into "ethnic" comedy films. Their earliest examples include titles such as Pickaninnies (1894), Three Man Dance (1894), Dancing Darkey Boy (1897), and Dancing Darkies (1897), all of which depicted blacks performing various dance movements.

As the film process expanded, films with more direct images of black inferiority appeared. The Wooing and Wedding of a Coon, described by its producers as a genuine Ethiopian comedy, appeared in 1905. According to Peter Noble, the film "unashamedly poked fun and derision at a coloured couple." In 1905, two other similar films were produced: Fights of a Nation and The Masher. While the former attacked various other minority groups, the latter was a typical example of the derogatory manner in which black people were portrayed in films during the pre-World War I era. In Fights of a Nation:

. . . a Mexican was caricatured as a treacherous "greaser," a Jew as a briber, a Spaniard as a foppish lover, an Irishman as a quarrelsome beer-drinker, and a Negro, inevitably as a cake-walker, buck dancer and razor thrower.³

The Masher, on the other hand:

. . . shows a lady-killer who is unsuccessful in his wooing with everyone with whom he tries to flirt. Finally he becomes successful with a lady wearing a veil, who quickly responds to his flirtation. However, when he makes further advances and lifts her veil, he discovers to his consternation that the lady of his choice is coloured.

And if the black man was not ridiculed with grotesque stereotypes, he was portrayed as a "devoted slave." For Massa's Sake (1911)

. . . told the story of a devoted slave who was so fond of his master that he tried to get himself sold in order to pay his beloved white boss's gambling debts.

In the years 1909, 1914, 1918, and 1927, motion pictures of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, were produced. Although Cabin was an anti-slavery novel, its screen versions followed the traditional dramatization of the black man by emphasizing and celebrating the submissiveness of the Uncle Tom figure. Its controversial nature was well demonstrated when the outstanding black stage

actor, Charles Gilpin, who had been chosen to play Tom in the 1927 version, quit the production in protest against the "unsympathetic" development of the characterization.

While Uncle Tom's Cabin symbolised the celebration of white supremacy, there were other productions which served to reinforce the myth of racial purity by portraying the people with even the slightest degree of non-white blood as sub-humans, or in sympathetic cases, as tragical figures. In The Debt (1912) and in In Slavery Days (1913):

The mulatto figure was depicted, in the harshest light as a basically evil and degrading type.⁴

And in The Octoroon (1913):

The mixed-blood character was portrayed as the "unfortunate" victim of circumstances who would have to suffer evermore for that drop of black blood in his/her veins.

However, the 1915 appearance of D.W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation made all these films look like low-keyed advocations of racial prejudice. Based upon the novels of Thomas Dixon, a Southerner with an unquestionably acute "black-phobia," The Birth of a Nation did not only become the most socially controversial film ever made, but also a technical and artistic milestone in the evolution of the motion picture process. We must acknowledge the fact that D.W. Griffith was a cinematic genius and a pioneer in employing seminal film-making techniques. Unfortunately, however, the more competent a film is artistically and technically, the more powerful and captivating is its propaganda.

Talking about the twelve-reeled film, Jim Pines says:

Griffith depicted the Reconstruction period of American Civil War history from a hard-core Southern reactionary point of view; he employed every bigoted syndrome of characterization and imagery that had been popularized by southern romance films--only he did so more obsessively, with outstanding conviction. Here, racist myth came into full bloom.

The film historian Lewis Jacobs, in his book The Rise of the American Film, made a precise summary of the social message in The Birth of a Nation:

The entire portrayal of the Reconstruction days showed the Negro, when freed from white domination, as arrogant, lustful and villainous. Negro Congressmen were pictured drinking heavily, coarsely reclining in Congress with bare feet upon their desks, lustfully ogling the white women in the balcony.⁵

The conclusion of the film was predictable; civilization, order and "justice" had to be restored. Southern white womanhood had to be protected from the "lustful negroes." And, alas! who were Griffith's patriots that rushed in heroically to save the day? None other than the dreadful white supremacist bands of the Klu Klux Klan. Thus, Griffith's new nation was born.

Apart from being the greatest financial success ever (guessed to have earned \$50 million), The Birth of a Nation was also the first film to be honored with a White House showing. Afterwards, President Wilson is said to have remarked: "It was like writing history with lightning." Whether he was for or against the film has not been recorded, but many reactions against the film were so vociferous that Griffith was forced to rise to its defense in 1916 with a pamphlet entitled "The Rise and Fall of Free Speech in America." Prominent among the forces which attacked the film was the then only a few years old National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

(NAACP), which sought to have the film banned. Distinguished individuals such as Charles Eliot, then President of Harvard University, Dr. Albert Bushnell Hart, the well-known historian at Harvard, and Rabbi Stephen Wise, all spoke bitterly against the film. In New York, the film was banned for a while, and it was also refused licence for exhibition in Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Ohio and several other Northern States.⁶

But throughout the South, the film was shown and a carnival atmosphere reigned whenever it entered a town. As Dr. Reddick⁷ observed, the film's justification of the Klu Klux Klan was at least one factor which enabled the Klan to enter upon its period of greatest expansion, reaching a total membership of five million.

With the advent of sound in motion pictures in the 1920's, dozens of films with unfavorable depictions of black people continued to be produced.⁸ But it wasn't until 1939, when David O. Selznick produced Gone with the Wind, after Margaret Mitchell's novel of the same title, that the dimensions and parallels of The Birth of a Nation were once again realised. Some critics⁹ felt that where The Birth of a Nation ended, Gone with the Wind began. Talking about the anti-black propaganda in Gone with the Wind, Dr. Reddick says:

The South was right. Gone with the Wind said in the most effective manner possible that the ante-bellum South, that wondrous land of beauty and happy slaves, had been destroyed by Union soldiers and Carpet-baggers. The Negroes in the film as in the novel did not want to be free. They were shown as liars, would-be rapists, mammies and devoted field hands. All this was so inter-woven with the story, presented so beautifully in technicolor, with all the arts of sight and sound co-ordinated, that the effect on the unsuspecting patron was irresistible.¹⁰

With sincerity and sympathy, all the aforementioned scholars of cinematic racial stereotypes have passionately explored and exposed the unfair portrayal of black people in films. Their treatment of the problem would otherwise be adequate, if not for a prevalence of idealistic orientations in most of their social views. Idealism in this particular context should be understood to mean a way of viewing social contradictions abstractly, as opposed to concretely. In the idealistic orientation, thought determines social being, i.e., social reality originates from the abstractions of the mind. Opposed to the idealistic orientation is the materialistic orientation which upholds that social being determines thought, i.e., the material existence of a person determines his thoughts. Not only did these scholars fail to identify and analyse the racist oppression of black people beyond the immediacy of skin complexions and social attitudes, they also failed to grasp its historical materialist basis, i.e., its relations with the development of Capitalism and Imperialism, which, at a certain stage, necessitated the exploitation of slave labor. For instance, in the introduction to his book (although we should give him credit for his extensive and thorough research), Peter Noble says:

The problem of the Negro is really the problem of whites; did not that eminent Jewish author, Lewis Golding, write somewhere about "the Gentile Problem"? It is white people everywhere who have the power to change attitudes; it is they who bring a new spirit of tolerance to the American scene.¹¹

Idealists emphasize attitudes of mind, rather than conditions which give rise to them as being the proper site of agitation, thus, like

in Noble's case, the liberalism and moralism. The idealist approach to changing reality is normally by a process of consciousness raising rather than through materialist analysis followed by co-ordinated action.

Similar to Noble, Richard Maynard finds no better justification for his study than a quotation from Dr. Reddick's article:

It is an old generalization that equality and full democracy will never be achieved this side of basic changes in the objective conditions of life. To this old maxim must be added another: democracy in race relations will never be achieved until the minds of people are changed. The direct route to these minds is through the great agencies of mass communications.¹²

Moralizing and idealism are evident in these contentions. Contrary to what these scholars seem to believe, attitudes and ideas do not, as we have already contended, originate from the abstractions of the mind, they spring from social conditions and social practices. Peoples' attitudes and ideas cannot be changed, not even by "the great agencies of mass communications," unless the social and material conditions that gave rise to them are changed.¹³ Of course, I do not underestimate the potentials of the agencies of mass communication in influencing and reforming social opinion, but, while being aware of the fact that influence or reform does not mean fundamental change, we should also acknowledge the fact that the use and effectiveness of these agencies will depend on who owns them. If they are in the hands of the American bourgeoisie, which draws economic benefit from the oppression of the working class black masses, it would take us a lot of naivety to believe that the bourgeoisie could be persuaded to trade economic benefit for higher morality, and let these agencies

portray the black captives as deserving humans. If black people were portrayed with images other than of sub-human savages from the very beginning, then their captors would not have had justification for their exploitation. As it appears then, racism in this context is only a mask for economic plunder. It is only a subsidiary issue, masking the main one. We can thus make a reasonable deduction that the struggle against racism can be fully realised only if forces are directed against the existence of the exploiting classes themselves, i.e., the struggle should be waged on a class basis rather than on a skin complexion basis.

The fact that efforts by civil rights and left wing organizations to have the racist films banned or the offending passages removed were not successful should demonstrate some lessons concerning the strategies of the struggle against racism. Jim Pines attributes the ineffectiveness of the efforts of these organizations to:

. . . their form of protest; namely their reciprocal (and therefore predictable) responses to specific, and usually prominent, racial films and characterizations, as opposed to, say, maintaining an overall strategy towards Hollywood and media racial processes.¹⁴

While I do agree with Mr. Pines that the reciprocal approach that the struggles against Hollywood's racism took should have been replaced by an "overall strategy towards Hollywood" I would still contend that the main reason for the frustration of these struggles was not in their approach but rather in the ideological level on which these struggles were carried, i.e., the moralistic and idealistic, rather than historical materialist or class struggle level. The NAACP and the various other organizations that led struggles against

The Birth of a Nation and other racist films put forward as their primary argument that it was "unjust" and "immoral" to portray the black race in grotesque images. They neither explored the material forces and implications of those films within the American socio-historical context, nor did they advocate a social revolution that would overthrow completely the American capitalist system. Little did they realise that so long as the American capitalist system remained unchanged and so long as social relations in America remained capitalist, and so long as the American popular culture media remained the domain of the capitalist classes, the ideals of the oppressive capitalist classes would continue to be promoted.

It is true that ever since its first appearance in Hollywood (and this should be attributed to the upsurges of black militancy in America and successes of African liberation movements), the image of blacks has progressed from being totally and directly grotesque, to even achieving an apparently heroic status in the 1970's. Yet, to study in detail the evolution of the black image in Hollywood, without reference to the broader historical context would only mean that we have fallen victims of Hollywood and bourgeois trick-bags which tempt us to take illusions for reality. It would also mean we are extremely idealistic to believe that real and favorable change can take place within the capitalist set-up. Let us take, for example, The Birth of a Nation and Gone with the Wind. In many cases Gone with the Wind has been either tolerated or totally accepted, as opposed to its predecessor, The Birth of a Nation. Even as recently as June 1976, NBC televised Gone with the Wind with tremendous success. Yet the

essence, the content and the message in the two films are remarkably identical. The only factor that makes the difference between the two is that while The Birth of a Nation was direct and blatant, Gone with the Wind was subtle and sly. The only difference between the two is in their form and not content. Indeed, slyness and subtlety increase as mass pressures on capitalist institutions increase.

An even bigger controversy will be found in the films produced since World War II and the black "boom" films of the late 1960's and 1970's that stunned the whole black world with the black perfect gentleman with the most suave of manners, Sidney Poitier, and the black super heroes like Jim Brown, Richard Roundtree (Shaft) and Fred Williamson (Hammer). Yet, when Hollywood dangles these black heroes before the black world what reason do we have to believe that these "super dudes" are not really camouflaged Uncle Toms or Tarzans? It is this that recent critics (with a qualified exception of Donald Bogle who nonetheless lacks ideological seriousness or depth)¹⁵ have failed to grasp, and it is a point which has vast importance for Afro-American as well as African cinema, for critics of the black cinema of the 1960's and 1970's think they have seen a revolution where none has taken place. The ensuing chapters will enlighten us further on the question of the deception entailed not only in the American "pro-black" films but also on the essentially neo-colonial interests embedded within African cinema.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

¹ For a comprehensive list of articles and periodicals see Blacks in American Movies: A Selective Bibliography, compiled and edited by Anne Powers (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1974).

² Lawrence D. Reddick, "Educational Programmes for the Improvement of Race Relations: Motion Picture, Radio, the Press and Libraries," The Journal of Negro Education, 13 (1944), p. 369.

³ Peter Noble, The Negro in Films (London: Skelton Robinson, 1948), p. 28. Following citations are from pp. 28-29.

⁴ Jim Pines, Blacks in the Cinema: The Changing Image (London: British Film Institute, 1971), p. 11. Following citations are from pp. 11-12.

⁵ Lewis Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940), p. 177.

⁶ As recently as the week of 12-16 March, 1979, the film was met with a demonstration when it was shown on the Indiana University Campus in Bloomington. It has not lost its power to offend.

⁷ See Reddick, op. cit., p. 371.

⁸ Since blacks were generally accredited with highly musical voices, the introduction of sound into the medium is supposed to have opened new opportunities for them in Hollywood. Ironically, it was a white posing as a black, Al Jolson, in the Jazz Singer, who starred in the first "talkie," a musical.

⁹ See Peter Noble, op. cit., pp. 75-80. Both Birth of a Nation and Gone with the Wind expressed idyllic sentiments for the antebellum South. In Gone with the Wind, the old South is painted with unreal beauty, represented by an immense, impeccable plantation with Arcadian grounds and a colonial mansion with a wonderful red-carpeted

staircase that ascends to heavenly rooms. A handsome gentleman, Rhett Butler, played by Clark Gable, and a perfectly elegant southern belle, Scarlet O'Hara, played by Vivien Leigh. The blacks in Gone with the Wind are shiftless and totally unenthusiastic about their freedom. Hattie McDaniels plays the black mammy--a strong, sexless mother-earth type and a perfect contrast to Vivien Leigh whom she protects with a religious devotion. The mammy stereotype occurred also in Guess Who Is Coming to Dinner (1968). When the black doctor (Sidney Poitier) tries to woo the white newspaper publisher's daughter, the black mammy in the house reacts to the news with alarm greater than that of the daughter's parents.

¹⁰ Reddick, op. cit., p. 372

¹¹ Peter Noble, op. cit., p. 11

¹² Cited by Richard Maynard in The Black Man on Films: Racial Stereotyping (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Co., Inc., 1974), p. vii.

¹³ See Chapter III which deals with the evolution of the black image in films and demonstrates how the image changes were subordinated to social and political changes, to social struggle.

¹⁴ Jim Pines, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁵ See Donald Bogle's Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films (New York: Viking Press, 1973).

CHAPTER III

FROM THE ORIGINS OF THE "LIBERAL" BLACK FILMS OF THE 1940'S TO THE BLAXPLOITATION FILMS OF THE 1970'S

The guiding question: Are we witnessing a real change or are we being deceived by the owners of Hollywood?

1

THE 1940'S AND 1950'S

After the 1939 Gone with the Wind, the black image in Hollywood films embarked on a curiously favorable trend. The blatantly sub-human and subservient depictions were replaced with films treating the blacks as "humans" entrapped in social problems. The dominant subject was the dilemma of the "social acceptance gap" of black emancipation.

This seemingly unexpected about-face of the motion picture industry should not be taken idealistically as an indication of softening hearts of the Hollywood film moguls. We should seek reasons in the social and political circumstances and forces in which the film industry was operating. Teshome Gabriel, a young film historian and critic at the University of California at Los Angeles¹ explained this about-face with four convincing reasons. First, he mentioned the second World War which gave blacks a new image due to

their role in fighting against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. By aiding Europe against the Nazi onslaught, contends Gabriel, Africans became perceived as somewhat human. Second, he cited protests by prominent black actors such as Paul Robeson, Rex Ingram and Hazel Scott. They rejected roles that would further dehumanize the black peoples protests, coupled with those of Africans conscripted into the French war efforts in Indochina and who after the war started their "16 mm movement," explained Gabriel, helped in arousing public consciousness against the historical portrayal of blacks by the film industries. Third, Gabriel contended that "the red baiting witch-hunt"² of the House Un-American Activities Committee helped white liberals move closer to the cause of black peoples. As victims of the witch-hunt, and in order to broaden their fighting base, the white liberals began to speak out forcefully in favor of the emancipation of blacks and viewed Africans as symbolic figures in struggles against oppression. Lastly, Gabriel mentioned a dramatic rise in civil rights movement, accentuating and solidifying the direction of black liberation.³

Hollywood's former formulas could just not fit into the new environment. A new circle of "black interest" films had to be started to suit the atmosphere. Home of the Brave (1949), adapted from Arthur Laurent's stage play about anti-semitism was the first Hollywood film produced with the new approach. The hero of the film is a black soldier fighting in the Pacific who suffers a paralysis because of a white G.I.'s bigotry. He recovers only when a white doctor, a psychologist, calls out in intended provocation "You

dirty Nigger get up and walk."⁴ Like in the rest of the new "black interest" films, the message in Home of the Brave was that the black's real problem was simply caused by a pathological inferiority complex.⁵ Now, how far have we departed from the old stereotypes, from Hollywood's old practices? Why would the blacks think that Home of the Brave, which subtly says that blacks have innate psychological problems which only require a "white expert on the negro problem" to cure them, is less racist than the pre-World War II films? Whereas The Birth of a Nation said bluntly "Nigger you are the problem," Home of the Brave said "Nigger you have a problem that only a white expert on Niggers can solve." Isn't the message really the same? It seems as though when the liberals and black activists cried out "cancer!" blacks were only given aspirins to ease their pain, while the disease continued to devour them, and they continued to "suffer peacefully." By all means, however, the conclusion here is that as long as the film industry remains in the hands of the same class which produced Gone with the Wind, we should be forever sceptical of the films they produce no matter how favorable to blacks these films appear to be on the superficial level.

Other films representative of the period were: Intruder in the Dust, Lost Boundaries and Pinkey, all released in 1949. According to Ralph Ellison,⁶ these films (often called social dramas), did indeed signal a newer approach, but each one of them dealt with a basic negative assumption about blacks. Whereas in the older days films spoke out unequivocally about the supposed inferiorities of blacks, these new films spoke with ambiguities: Home of the Brave questions

whether or not blacks are cowardly soldiers; Intruder in the Dust whether or not blacks are the pollutors of the South; Lost Boundaries whether or not mulatto blacks have the right to pass as whites, and Pinkey questions whether or not the black Pinkey should marry a white man or help her race.⁷

Making a conclusive remark on the "liberal" films of the 1940's, Gabriel says:

In these so-called social dramas, white liberalism singularly continued to play the role of the definer of black consciousness and how it ought to function in an integrated society. It saw the black problem simply as a social problem, and the only solution, the bridging of the social acceptance gap. The liberal cinema, though integrationist in approach remained, nevertheless, allied too closely to liberal gradualism to create any meaningful radical social change.⁸

After the 1940's we enter into another period, the 1950's and 1960's, with yet another remarkable phase of the black image in film. The theme of the acceptability (integration) of the black middle class (i.e., petty bourgeoisie) by white America was predominant. This new theme was ushered in following, inevitably, the mounting pressures of American blacks to make their presence felt and the rising consciousness of the public in favor of emancipation of blacks.

Sidney Poitier, a handsome performer with gentle and suave manners was the token black chosen to play the new stereotype. He carried himself with dignity, and exhibited intelligence and reason. He was almost always starred as a professional: doctor in No Way Out (1950), student leader in The Blackboard Jungle (1955), sergeant in All the Young Men (1960), jazz musician in Paris Blues (1961), psychiatrist in Pressure Point (1962), reporter in The Bedford

Incident (1965), and crack homicide detective in In the Heat of the Night (1967).

However, Guess Who Is Coming to Dinner (1968) was the most remarkable and controversial of Poitier's films. He was starred in an Oscar-winning role as a brilliant doctor about to win a Nobel prize who wants to marry the daughter of a white San Francisco newspaper publishing tycoon. The controversy of the theme and Poitier's superb performance made the film a top box office success and Poitier the first Hollywood black superstar.

While many critics validly agreed that Poitier's image was a major breakthrough compared to the old stereotypes, others criticised him for being unreal, for playing idealized figures of the "good guy hero." In an article entitled "Why Does White America Love Syndey Poitier So,"⁹ the New York Times columnist, Clifford Mason, accused Poitier of continuously remaining unreal and playing essentially the same role of the antiseptic one-dimensional hero. He further accused Poitier of living in a totally white (read: petty bourgeois) world and playing the role of a sexless black eunuch. He observed, for example, that while Guess Who Is Coming to Dinner was about love and marriage, Poitier and wife-to-be kissed just once and were only seen through the rear-view mirror of a cab.¹⁰

When Hollywood tired of exploiting Poitier's unrealistic perfect-gentleman extremity, it replaced it with yet another one, now, of "supersexed noble savage," starring the muscular ex-pro-footballer, Jim Brown, the hero whipped everyone and every mob. In Rio Conchos, by which he made his acting debut, Brown played a courageous black

soldier in the period following the civil war. After that he starred in various other films: The Split, Black Gunn, Slaughter and Cool Breeze, always playing the Saturday night hero roles. Then, also, he was the super stud, "doing it" with white sex symbols. He had Raquel Welch in 100 Rifles (1968) and Stella Stevens in Slaughter (1972).¹¹

Contrasting sharply with the Poitier and Brown integrationist appeals and also opening ground for the full swing of the notorious "Blaxploitation" phenomenon, was another black image espousing complete racial separatism. Jules Dassin's Uptight (1968) was the forerunner in this category. Whites, intergrationist blacks, moderates and all non-violence prone pacifists were the villains in the film. Black militants were having their day.^{12, 13}

Robert Downey's Putney Swope (1970) was another example. Putney Swope was a "comedy" about an advertising company taken over by blacks. Putney, the only black member of the board was elected Chairman when each member of the board voted for him thinking no one else would. As Chairman, Putney proceeded to revamp the whole structure, renaming it "Truth and Soul." Whites became subordinates, messengers and maids. Sex, music and black revolution rhetoric speeches by blacks wearing revolutionary uniforms stole the scene. Is this not just a reinforcement of the old stereotypes of "negroes going beserk" as in The Birth of a Nation?

Measured against the Poitier integrationist films, this new image was dialectically more reactionary, for, whereas the integrationist films were trying to bring members of the upper classes--the black petit-bourgeoisie (the black doctor) and the white bourgeoisie

(the white newspaper tycoon)--together as members of the same class, the separatist films saw social differences only on color lines.

BLAXPLOITATION: THE LATE 1960'S AND EARLY 1970'S

"Blaxploitation" is the term applied to the phenomenon experienced in the late 1960's and early 1970's in which almost suddenly, Hollywood filled the screens with an incessant wave of black films. The term "blaxploitation" was initially coined by black critics, psychologists and organizations that charged these films with representing negative and degrading views of black personality and life.¹⁴ These authorities contended that the exploitation was not only financial, at the box office, but more so, psycholigical.

Again, there are economic and social-political foundations for the emergence of this phenomenon.

First, owing to the popularity of television, movie audiences had dwindled considerably by the 1960's. For example, in 1971 only 17.5 million Americans attended a movie a week compared with a peak of 180 million in 1946. At the same time Hollywood film production had fallen from 378 to 143 pictures a year. Admission prices had tripled during those years but the gross box office receipts were down twenty-five percent over the previous quarter century.¹⁵ The movie industry was facing an economic crisis.

Second, movie audiences were younger as well as blacker; older people preferred to stay home and watch the "tube" while youngsters

"went out," and blacks were migrating to the city centres where cinemas were concentrated while whites migrated to the suburbs.¹⁶

Third, the mood in the streets was that of protest: young people, students and liberals were protesting against the establishment and culture that perpetuated the imperialist war in Vietnam. The black communities were then living the aftermath of Malcolm X, the powerful advocate of black militancy who had been assassinated in 1965. Stokeley Carmichael was preaching "Black Power" in the black communities and on college campuses. LeRoy Jones changed his name to Imam Amiri Baraka, donned an African dashiki, beads around his neck, a beard, and carried the message of black nationalism all across America. Angela Davis, ex-protégée of the revisionist Herbert Marcuse, with her flamboyant afro hair-do and the clenched fist was a political prisoner and a cause célèbre for blacks and "leftists" the world over. In the music halls blacks were soaking with sweat dancing to James Brown's hit single, "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I Am Proud!" "Black Pride," "Black Power" and "Black Is Beautiful," slogans were everywhere in the atmosphere.

Fourth, in Hollywood, black actors were pressing for more representation in pre- as well as post-filming phases of production so that they could have some influence on the portrayal of the black image on the screen. An example of this was exhibited by Brock Peters who wrote to the Screen Actors Guild in the summer of 1970, requesting that his name be removed from all screen credits and advertising in the Chevron Pictures release The MacMasters in which he had starred as a black ex-soldier romantically involved with an Indian girl.

According to Peters, seven minutes were deliberately cut off the scene showing remorse felt by the character he played after raping the Indian girl. "The cuts dehumanize the character I played and move it close to a brutish, unpalatable stereotype," Peters complained.¹⁷ Harold Jacobs, the film's scriptwriter joined Peters in his protest, also demanding that his name be removed from all screen credits and ads.

These protests, the "black hurricane" in the streets, and the industry's economic recession forced Hollywood to make adjustments-- for no other reason than its own economic survival. At this point any careful eye can see where all roads were leading. Gordon Parks Sr., former photo-journalist for Life magazine and author of several books, stories and poems, was hired as the first black director by Warner Brothers. Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America hailed the appointment as "one of the finest hours of Hollywood history."¹⁸ And immediately, with the consent and direction of the industry, Parks set the cornerstone for blaxploitation films with Shaft (1970), starring Richard Roundtree, an ex-athlete and Ebony magazine model; Shaft, Harlem's answer to James Bond thrillers, was a box-office bombshell. In less than six months it grossed in excess of \$15 million.¹⁹ Hollywood had found the formula for extending reactionary fantasies to blacks. MGM followed with sequels; Shaft's Big Score (1972) and Shaft in Africa (1973), starring the same actor, Roundtree. But Superfly (1972), a Warner Brothers production, directed by Gordon Parks Jr., son of Gordon Parks Sr., seems to have topped them all. It grossed an excess of \$11 million in two months of

its initial screening. Once again having a winning number, Paramount followed it with a sequel, Superfly TNT (1973).

The list of films with the Shaft and Superfly themes is both long and sometimes vexatious to the spirit with its ridiculous attachments of racial adjectives to the titles in order to attract black audiences. After Shaft, blacks paid their money to see Black Jesus, Black Chariot, Black Eye, Black Heat, Black Mama, Black Godfather, Black Love, Black Bunch, Black Caesar, Black is Beautiful, Black Fantasy, Black Majesty, Black Bolt, Blacula (!), Africa Erotica... and the list goes on, like a "black" chant.²⁰

The typical hero of a blaxploitation film is usually super: super-sexed, super-slick, and super-strong. He usually indulges in a lot of multi-racial sex scenes (black male and white female). He kills a great number of people or gangsters. He triumphs over whites and the law. He is capable of having any woman, outrunning any cars, outsmarting any cop.

Walter Burrell, a young film critic, commenting on the impact of these films on black youth, says:

The films contain certain basic elements which reflect the educational and social level of urban ghetto youth and offer them a type of escapism from their otherwise humdrum lives. The images that the films reflect are harmful and dangerous because they reinforce negative images, which are glorified and become for our youth the attainable standard. It's frightening when crime becomes what's "in."²¹

Reactions against "blaxploitation" films came from various sources and various perspectives. Among organizations that expressed opposition to these films were the National Catholic Office, which

rated the "blaxploitation" film series "C" (condemned), the Southern California NAACP and the Black Artists Alliance of Hollywood which opposed "lumpen" depictions of black people. Brock Peters, one of the members of the Black Artists Alliance of Hollywood expressed his views in The Hollywood Reporter:

. . . I believe the public is getting tired of all the blood and gore, and we feel blacks and whites alike will respond to warm and human films. Like everyone else, there are a lot of blacks looking for films to which they can take their families.²²

Gordon Parks Sr., the creator of Shaft, the initiator of the whole blaxploitation phenomenon expressed some interesting views when questioned about Shaft, a work so directly contrasting to The Leanin
Tree (1969) which he had made about his life:

I guess a black man has to prove himself, and I have done this picture to show them what I can do. And from now on, I want a chance to do the same kind of pictures that any director does.²³

And concerning the impact of blaxploitation films on blacks, Parks had this to say:

It's ridiculous to imply that blacks don't know the difference between truth and fantasy and therefore will be influenced by these films in an unhealthy way.²⁴

It is obvious that Parks is just defending himself²⁵ and those who made him the first black Hollywood director.

The magnitude of the sellout was witnessed by Hollywood's main organ, Daily Variety, of October 9, 1974, when it proudly reported that the motion picture industry was on the verge of its highest domestic box office results in twenty-eight years! And Walter Burrell, the film critic and publicist, estimated that in 1973 blacks paid over

\$173 million to see movies, of which 95 percent went²⁶ to the owners of the industry who are white. No better words could conclude this part than Harold Weaver Jr.'s opening remarks in his review of James P. Murray's book To Find an Image; Black Films from Uncle Tom to Superfly.

He says:

Black people are saving the popular Hollywood dream factory as they have saved the popular record industry. Yet the distorted images of black people in American films are matched by the paucity of serious scholarship on the subject.²⁷

3

BLAXPLOITATION FILMS IN AFRICA: THE EXAMPLE OF TANZANIA

The October 1973 issue of Joe magazine in Kenya carried an article, "Images of Black Reality,"²⁸ which contained some crucial remarks on the negative role of black films in the relations between Africans and Afro-Americans. Pointing out that historically, there has always been a poor understanding of the reality of Afro-American life by Africans, William Alfred Payne quotes Fred Agyemang, director of Ghana Journalism Institute:

. . . the pity is that all that many Africans know about overseas Africans [Afro-Americans] is that they were stolen away in sailing ships and that now they are beginning to come back.²⁸

But this "coming back" was on two conflicting levels. On the one hand there were individuals and black political and cultural organizations "returning" to Africa to join their brethren in their

political liberation efforts. On the other hand there was the insistent flood of the "blaxploitation" films into the African cinema halls.

Tanzania, which has become one of the most favoured African destinations for Afro-Americans, provides the best illustration of the two conflicting "returns." Factors attributable to Tanzania's charisma for Afro-Americans would include, first, Ujamaa (Tanzania's "socialism") which idealistically provided many illusions to the Afro-Americans who had gone through the cultural explosions of the 1960's in the USA. For the US black cultural nationalists, who had adopted Swahili as their national language, Dar-es-Salaam (the capital of Tanzania) was the best place to learn the language.

Second, Tanzania's political stability; with the exception of a bloodless, abortive army mutiny in 1964 and an unsuccessful plot by the self-exiled ex-minister Oscar Kambona in 1968, Tanzania, unlike most African nations, has not had any coups or traumatic political incidents.

Third, Tanzania provides headquarters for all national liberation movements for Southern Africa. Military training camps for Southern African refugees are maintained in various parts of the country. All those Afro-Americans who are concerned with the liberation of "the motherland" would choose Tanzania as their base of operation.

Whatever other reasons there might be, the influx of Afro-Americans to Tanzania had reached a noticeable peak by the early 1970's. There was an Afro-American involvement in many levels of Tanzanian society; in the schools, as teachers and students; in the

factories as workers, and in the villages as farmers and visitors to the "Ujamaa villages."

However, the most significant of their involvements were their material and moral contributions to the national liberation efforts in Southern Africa. For instance, in 1973, under the leadership including Imam Baraka (né LeRoi Jones), Owusu Sadankai (né Howard Fuller), Haki Madhubuti (né Don L. Lee) and Brenda Paris from Montréal, Canada, the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) which initiated African Liberation Day Celebrations in the USA in 1972, presented 300,000 Tanzanian shillings to the African Liberation Movement's fund. At the same time ALSC members and Afro-American journalists were going into the liberated areas of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea Bissau to report on the struggle.

If the African masses were starting to have positive images of the Afro-American from such actions, such images were continuously harrassed by the ever-powerful Hollywood "blaxploitation" film images. The Afro-American individual in Tanzania, instead of pursuing whatever objectives (or illusions) he had intended, found himself at battle with suspicion and in some cases outright hostility from the Africans. Credibility sought through nervous conversations or articles of self-image cleansing sent to the Tanzania's Daily News failed to erase the compelling cinematic distortions of their real identities that appear nightly on Tanzanian screens. The state of African/Afro-American relations that prevailed in Tanzania by the summer of 1974 is a proof that it is the blaxploitation film image that was triumphant, that "art" is stronger than reality. During this time the Pan-African

movement was holding the Sixth Pan-African Congress in Dar-es-Salaam, after almost a quarter-century of dormancy. The movement had been initiated at the beginning of this century by black and African intellectuals and ideological theoreticians whose names included W.E.B. Dubois, C.L.R. James, Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore. The Congress took place at the campus of the University of Dar-es-Salaam's Nkrumah Hall. The objectives of the Congress, as initially spelled out by its host, President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, included the need to foster unity among all the peoples of African descent, to fight racism, colonialism, and imperialism. Delegates arrived in Dar-es-Salaam from all corners of the world. The biggest contingent, however, was the USA delegation which consisted of 800 delegates.

Everything seemed to be working out orderly and according to plan until, almost suddenly, news came out that two Afro-Americans had been arrested by Tanzanian authorities, charged with importation of tons of military hardware, with intentions of toppling Nyerere's government. A nervous atmosphere reigned in the capital...An order was issued by the Prime Minister's office for police questioning of all Afro-Americans in the nation and immediate arrest of all those appearing suspicious. Tanzanian police officers, victims of the blaxploitation film images of Afro-American people, performed the Prime Minister's orders in the manner most appropriate for confrontations with the Shaft or Superfly stereotypes themselves. Afro-Americans were harrassed, beaten up and thrown in jail for as little as having an infant's toy walkie-talkie in the house. By the time appeals and outcries from the Afro-American community reached the attention of

President Nyerere (who quietly saved the day), the scandalous incident had reached great extentions. Afro-Americans were fleeing the country in shock and confusion.

As the story turned out later, the two Afro-Americans accused of intending to overthrow Nyerere's government, were as innocent as innocence can be. The "tonnages of military hardware" in the story were exaggerated weights of a Volkswagen ambulance, hunting shotguns and other farm equipment they were donating to an Ujamaa village in Mwanza, where they were intending to settle as farmers.

Nobody would explain this scandalous incident better, in relation to blaxploitation films, than Payne:

No African government in its right mind is going to think about welcoming a horde of dope-pushing, girl-chasing head whippers to engage in nation-building. Conservative African governments are not going to welcome gun-toting, bad-talking dudes when African governments (when they really care) are attempting to build a viable African culture for their people.²⁹

NOTES

CHAPTER III

¹ Teshome Gabriel, "Images of Black People in Cinema," UFAHAMU, 6 (1976), pp. 133-167.

² See also Stephen Arnold, "Film in Tanzania, I: Literary and Ideological Aspects," UMMA, 6 (1976), p. 25.

³ I would also attribute the dramatic rise of the civil rights movement to the imperialist World War II. Blacks from the Americas and the African colonies, after participating in the war against fascism, returned home bent on demanding the same democratic rights they had been defending abroad. In Africa there was a general outcry for "Uhuuru" (freedom), culminating in some cases in a call for armed struggle (Mau Mau in Kenya), and in the USA blacks were more ready than ever to stand their ground against racism and oppression. We must also spell out more clearly some of the implications in Gabriel's article. For example it should be noted that many whites and blacks first had intimate interracial contact during the great war against fascism. It is not surprising, therefore, that the old Hollywood image of blacks had to be refurbished in order not to conflict too violently with the life experience of a significant section of movie-goers. Thus respect born of comradeship made the films accept some blacks as "mighty white."

⁴ Quoted in Edward Mapp, Blacks in American Films (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1972), p. 37.

⁵ See Teshome Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁶ Ralph Ellison, "The Shadow and the Act," The Reporter, 6 December 1949, p. 18.

⁷ Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p.

⁸ Gabriel, *ibid.*, p. 143.

⁹ Clifford Mason, "Why Does White America Love Sidney Poitier So?," New York Times, 19 September 1967, Section II, p. 21.

10

Sidney Poitier's response to such criticism can be found, first, in James Murray's book To Find an Image (Indianapolis/New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1973), pp. 27-35. On page 33, Poitier is quoted as saying, "You may have noticed--and this is the first time I have mentioned this--that when I get jumped on for a bad movie, you never hear a peep out of me. You never hear my refutation, no placing the blame somewhere else, no discussing how bad the director was. . . ."

In another response to criticism, which is also probably evidence of his financial independence, Poitier's later works deceitfully suggest a complete turn-about from his former roles and image. He has, since 1972, produced, directed and starred in various films dealing with social problems from the lives of ex-slaves after the civil war and the ghettos of the US cities to the townships of South Africa. When Poitier made Buck and the Preacher (1972), he confidently took it to Black Colleges and even to Tanzania. Other films of the "new" Poitier include: The Organization (1973), A Warm December (1973), The Wilby Conspiracy (1975), and A Piece of the Action (1978). For an ideological criticism of Poitier's later films see Stephen Arnold's "Film in Tanzania, I: Literary and Ideological Aspects," UMMA, 6 (1976), pp. 43-49.

11

For a better understanding of the black "supersexed noble savage" image in American society I would suggest reading "The Allegory of the Black Eunuchs" in Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice (New York: Dell, 1968), pp. 155-175.

12

Jim Pines, Blacks in the Cinema: The Changing Image (London: British Film Institute, 1971), p. 8.

13

One interesting point about this film which no white person would feel comfortable watching is that its director, Jules Dassin, is a white--just another proof that those who felt that a change was really taking place for blacks were just being fooled with illusions while the same old Hollywood moguls filled their pockets with money.

14

See Renée Ward, "Black Films, White Profits," Black Scholar, 7 (1976), p. 14.

15

See James Murray, To Find an Image (Indianapolis/New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1973), p. 118.

16

See Jerzy Toeplitz, Hollywood and After: The Changing Face of American Cinema (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974), pp. 121-132.

17

James Murray, op. cit., p. 119.

18

Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁹ Teshome Gabriel, op. cit., p. 146.

²⁰ Teshome Gabriel gives us a longer list of blaxploitation films with racial adjectives. See page 147 of his article.

²¹ Quoted by Renée Ward, "Black Films, White Profits," Black Scholar, 7 (1976), p. 22. Recently, some cities in the USA have had to stop the showing of the film The Warriors, about gang fights in New York, because of its direct advocacy of violence. There have been many incidents of violent confrontations among the viewers as they left the theatres showing the film.

²² The Hollywood Reporter, 7 November 1973, p. 3.

²³ James P. Murray, op. cit., p. 67.

²⁴ Charles Michener, "Black Movies," Newsweek, 23 October 1972, p. 74.

²⁵ It is difficult to imagine that the same Parks once spent a long time travelling to and from a remote village in Brazil writing a story of an impoverished sick boy for Life magazine, a story that captured national attention in the USA. It is also difficult to imagine that the same Parks was a personal friend of Malcolm X and wrote an essay on him because he visited him only two days before his death. How can this same Parks, with all the experiences he has had with the oppressed and their leaders, and as an artist be so ignorant about the question of media influence on the masses?

²⁶ Renée Ward, op. cit., p. 16.

According to James Murray's To Find an Image, op. cit., p. 170, Richard Roundtree, the star in the Shaft series, received only \$13,500 for the first of the series and fought unsuccessfully for a \$50,000 salary for the second of the series. MGM made more than \$10 million in profits. Perhaps this will answer those blacks who urged that if the blaxploitation films were negative at least they were enriching some black actors.

²⁷ See Harold D. Weaver, Jr.'s, review of James P. Murray's To Find an Image: Black Films from Uncle Tom to Superfly, in Black Scholar, 7 (1976), p. 58.

²⁸ See William Alfred Payne, "Images of Black Reality," Joe (Nairobi), October 1973, p. 28.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

CHAPTER IV

UP FROM AFRO-AMERICAN CINEMA: REVOLUTIONARY AFRICAN CINEMA?

Often referred to as the "seventh art," film, the youngest of all the art forms, is still considered by many as the lowest in a hierarchy of the arts. However, when it is confronted from a socio-historical vantage point, the frequent if not inevitable conclusion is that it is worth as much scholarly and critical attention as the "higher" art forms. This conclusion results not only from considerations of its quantitatively superior social accessibility, its status as the art of the masses, but also from its devastatingly impressive formal qualities. It has vast capacity for the invention of new techniques and for the application of techniques suggested by other arts (e.g., poetry), such as montage,¹ which can be used for conveying messages subliminally, and far more than any of the other arts, it is powerfully empirical.

Whereas a book can be lain aside when the reader wants to apply his critical faculties, or a passage can be re-read as many times as it is necessary for comprehension, films, with their fast forward-moving images, do not give the viewers time to reflect and arrive at conceptual or logical conclusions; they limit the viewer to the perceptual stage of cognition. This compellingly truncated and fragmented reality impedes the viewer's ability to grasp the essence of what is being represented. This point is developed by Stephen Arnold in "Film in Tanzania, I: Literary and

Ideological Aspects." He demonstrates the social class basis of many cinematic techniques, and in one place he warns:

The inherent danger of an overly empirical approach to reality has been intensively exploited by bourgeois film makers who often paralyze the intellect by flooding the senses with swiftly moving images.²

Anti-capitalist film makers often realize this, and try to use the medium to the people's advantage. The present essay joins this side of cinema studies, and takes as its starting point Leo Hurwitz's appeal in a 1934 New Theatre magazine interview:

We must think of our films as having the same capacity as union organizers. . . . We are handling a very important political weapon, more effective at this time than car-loads of bullets and machine guns.³

Before we start to discuss this "weapon" in relation to Africa, it is worthwhile to remark that any weapon can be used offensively (by the unrighteous) or defensively (by the righteous), that its negative or positive application will all depend on whose hands it happens to be in.

African films today have attained a high level of artistic achievement, but do not enjoy wide distribution for a number of reasons.⁴ The major reason is that they deal with issues sensitive to both the neo-colonial masters in the metropolitan countries and to their agents in the neo-colonies. Official and/or indirect censorship often prevents screenings, and the metropole makes its own films on similar subjects as those treated by African film-makers, and these enjoy wide distribution. Such is the case with Shaft in Africa (Brotherland in the Motherland) and Bako: L'Autre Rive.



Both Shaft and Bako treat the historical fact of illegal exportation of young men from West African francophone countries, who end up working in semi-slavery conditions in Paris. Shaft was produced by Hollywood's MGM. Bako, which won a prize at the 1978 Cannes film festival, was produced by an individual African film-maker. Shaft "solves" the problem so swiftly and with such ease that the hero, in an atmosphere created by catchy tunes from the pop group, "The Four Tops," gets time to engage in love-making scenes with a random harem. Bako, on the other hand, slowly chronicles the painful passage of the "captives" from their native land to their European destination and never takes lightly the gravity of the struggles involved in solving the problem of this twentieth-century slave trade. The African film-maker's primary concern is historical truth. Hollywood's primary concern is commercial profit; its secondary concern is the "Afro-American man's burden." Shaft must save these people, who are portrayed as helpless without assistance from foreigners.

Another reason why African made films are not widely distributed is because their sense of time and space is distinctly non-European. In this we can see a progressive break with Europe being made by Africans. For example, let us briefly discuss Haile Gerima's Harvest 3000 years and Alex Haley's "Slumber" in Roots II. African timing is slow, repetitive (feudal); Western timing is swift, economical (capitalist). In Harvest, a four-hour film, timing is extremely slow. A "western" viewer could easily be "bored to death" by the repetitive images, endless oral exchanges and the apparently insignificant scenes. Time and time again we are shown the peasants

ploughing, slowly, carefully. The camera brings up details of everything: the wooden plough as it cuts through the earth, the weeds as they fall, the oxen as they strain their muscles pulling the plough. When people talk they do not hurry. There are moments of short silences which punctuate conversations. Kebebe, a madman, goes to the landlord's fence several times to give him a lecture. And every time we are made to listen to him patiently till he is through or chased away by the landlord's servant. Under the bridge we see Kebebe washing his legs--socks and all--slowly, carefully, talking to each leg as he washes it. During the mourning for a drowned girl we are made to watch a head shaving in all details. Time is never rushed. Activities are never taken lightly. Images are never allowed to fade swiftly away. Allan Hill, a reporter for Time magazine and specialist in African affairs research, talking about the question of time and space in African cinema, said:

In general, the Western value system embraces a reverence for reason, for the logical and the scientific, squeezing reality into rigid mechanical schemes. Processes or events that can't be manipulated or described by purely rational laws of logic are ignored. The net effect of Western culture is that at its most extreme we become separate, autonomous egos--dehumanized robots unaware of the reality of togetherness. On the other hand, an ideal of many traditional African cultures involves a holistic concept of man. It's a philosophy that does not isolate man but transcends "I" to the oneness of "we," developing a unity that embraces the magical, the divine, the mysteries for which there are no words. Man and his reason for being are viewed within a much larger framework, in context with his surroundings or "social space." People, animals, the touch of trees, the sun, the river, the earth, all are celebrated and are part of the individual's social space. In Africa man and his environment are united.⁵

What Hill is talking about are actually differences found between feudalistic societies and capitalistic societies, agricultural and industrial. In the feudal society one watches a plant grow, mature and bear fruit. In the industrialised societies machines manufacture merchandise quickly and readily for competition in the market. In the African societies (with their feudal social relations), oral traditions are still stronger than the mechanised "western" book culture. In Roots II, Alex Haley (played by James Earl Jones), an Afro-American, the only "Westerner" among all the people listening to a griot as he orally recounted the history of the Kinte clan, was also the only one who fell asleep. While all the villagers of Jiffure listened attentively to the story, Haley was unable to keep awake with the slow-paced, endless story. He woke only when the griot mentioned Kunta Kinte's trip to the bush to cut wood for making a drum. The villagers were attentive to every word. Their collective story was being told. Haley, cut off from communal society, showed interest only in those details that pertained to him as a distinct individual. The scene could be taken as symbolic of the differences between African literature (including cinema) and its Afro-American counterpart.

One last contrasting element between African and Afro-American cinema which we will cite here is the use of music. African cineasts could, if they wanted to, follow the western cinema and lay artificial sound tracks over the natural track "heard" by the camera. Instead they eschew the use of orchestras to heighten tension, to suggest emotions, etc. Yet they do use music. Shaft in Africa runs

through deserts and highlands in Ethiopia, urged on by invisible orchestras who play nothing resembling African music. Haile Gerima in Harvest 3000 Years has music played by griot-type entertainers in peasant bars, songs sung by people as they work and play. When the soundtrack--one of the most sophisticated ever composed--lays recorded--but not studio--music over the action, it is the same type of music that a griot would use while narrating the type of action that appears on the screen. Thus we can conclude that for this reason too, African audiences and Afro-American audiences value different things; art is more equivalent to artifice in Hollywood, to nature, or environment in Africa.⁶

In spite of the attainment of an authentic African flavor and aesthetic,⁷ however, African film-makers do not operate in an emancipated industry. They are still captives of a neo-colonial industry. Thus we must turn from art to industry in order to understand what pressures exist against further significant--i.e., revolutionary--development in African cinema.

A realistic discussion of Africa or anything sociologically related to Africa, leads inevitably to discussions (at least implicitly) of the historical situations of colonialism and imperialism, and of the subjugation and exploitation of the African masses by the imperialist Western powers, which started in the fifteenth century. And if one of the factors which facilitated this colonization was the imperialist's possession of gun-powder, I think it is extremely essential to discuss the ways and extents to which he has applied his cultural weaponry that is "more effective than carloads of bullets

and machine guns," a discussion which will at the same time be an analysis of the state of film in Africa.

One of the valuable observations made at the December 1973 meeting of the "Third World" film-makers at Algiers concerning the use of film as a tool of imperialism was that, in order to make legitimate and strengthen its hold over the economies of the colonized and neo-colonized countries, imperialism has recourse to a systematic enterprise of deculturation and acculturation of the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and that deculturation consists of depersonalizing their peoples, of discrediting their culture by presenting it as inferior and inoperative, of blocking their specific development, and of disfiguring their history. In other words, creating an actual cultural vacuum favorable to a simultaneous process of acculturation through which the dominator endeavors to make his domination legitimate by introducing his own moral values, his life and thought patterns, his explanation of history.⁸

Even before the introduction of cinema into Africa in the first half of this century, the "deculturation" and "acculturation" process had been the primary way of pacifying the colonized. The colonial missionaries and "educators" told the colonized that his culture was savage, backward and heathen. They urged him to abandon his "savage jungle dances" and his "heathen pagan" names. He was told that the German or the French folk dances were civilized and ideal. He was told to abandon names such as "Soori Kaaya" and to pick up an English name, "Edward." Film, then, was for the colonizer just a superior tool with which to enhance this deculturation and brainwashing of the

colonized, encouraging blind worship of foreign attitudes and ways of life.

In anglophone Africa,⁹ film market research, experimental projects and subsequently the cultural pacification process were initiated with the "friendly assistance" of the Colonial Office and later the British Film Unit (BFI). According to BFI, cinema was supposed to achieve the following aims:

- (a) to help the adult African to understand and adapt himself to the new conditions which are invading and threatening to overwhelm him.
- (b) to reinforce the ordinary methods of the classroom and the lecture hall.
- (c) to conserve what is best in African traditions and culture by representing this in their proper setting stages in racial development and as an inheritance to be cherished with pride.
- (d) to provide recreation and entertainment.¹⁰

Although these aims may have subtly tried to overshadow the imperialist essences embedded in them by pretensions of "good will," they failed to hush the colonial patronizing tone. More revealing than the BFI document, to supplement the BFI with information as to how best ensure maximum effect with its tools of cultural imperialism, the "Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment" projects were launched. Manned by missionaries, the projects conducted experiments such as the ones of 1921 to 1931 (in South Africa) and 1935 to 1937 (in East Africa)¹¹ on reactions of peasants to various types of films. In the South African experiment, through relentless efforts of the missionaries, films were distributed to 143 centres, and reached an audience of 250,000 to 300,000, made up entirely of African workers and peasants. The content of these films, apart from being totally irrelevant to the culture or the oppressive social conditions of the African

peasants and workers, contained three predominant aspects of cultural imperialism:

- (a) the religious epics;
- (b) the kitchen sink drama;
- (c) the antics of comics like Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, etc.¹²

The enormous service that these foreign films could do for imperialism, even on short term basis, is demonstrated in an observation by a "Social Worker" of the American Board Missions in the Transvaal:

These films demonstrated their value in the white miners' strike of January 1922. Two hundred thousand native workers were kept idle in their compounds. The mission workers were asked to speed up the showings of films. By giving the natives something to interest them and to talk about, these films helped to keep down riotous talk and to prevent an outbreak of black workers.¹³

The account of the 1935-1937 East African Experiment which Stephen Arnold finds ". . . ostensibly well-meaning [but] full of unconscious racism, conscious cultural chauvinism, and paternalism"¹⁴ advocated various reforms and modifications of the South African experiment. Conscious of the incapacity of the "unsophisticated" African audience to relate and identify with the backgrounds in the imported melodramas, and (of course) conscious also that these melodramas lacked the badly needed propaganda for making the native more economically productive for the Empire, the East African Experiment favored the local production and processing of films. This recommendation, which was heeded by the Department of Social and Industrial Research of the Missionary Council and the Colonial Office in London, was instituted both strongly and practically by William Sellers, who,

by his work with, and protection of the Colonial Film Unit (which was "making films with Africans"), earned himself the title of a "well known expert on the use of film for illiterate audiences."¹⁵ He is said to have produced over 350 films for the Colonial administration on the West and East coasts of Africa.

On the one hand, a large number of these locally produced films were geared to promote capitalist modes of production and to encourage African farmers to cultivate more productively--of course for the colonizers' benefit. On the other hand, these films which were extensively distributed both in the colonies and in the metropolitan countries, never portrayed or expressed the overwhelming desire by the Africans to liberate themselves from the yoke of colonialism. The Africans were consistently portrayed as docile, unintelligent and helpless; and this is a good example of how the colonial rulers endeavored to entrench racism and legitimize imperialism in the minds of the metropolitan masses.

In francophone Africa there is no evidence of initial film experiments or projects similar to those conducted by the British in their colonies. What we find here is an earlier interest and initiative by the French film-makers to make films in Africa. For example, as early as 1897, Georges Méliès¹⁶ was showing his Le Musulman rigolo in his studio at Montreuil-sous-Bois, and in 1903, he showed Ali Barbouyou and Ali Bouf' à l'huile. Georges Méliès and other French film-makers after him were interested in the African "exotisme" which fiction had not been able to present visually to the European audiences. However, the important question here is how these film-makers

from the colonial system which is well known for its cultural chauvinism and aggressiveness portrayed the African native. Guy Hennebelle distinguishes three categories in which the Africans were portrayed in the French colonial cinema: (a) where they were simply absent and represented by the sun, the Sahara, the palm trees, the camels, the wild animals, the virgin forest and many other similar phenomena; (b) where they were elevated to the status of the "indigènes," a title which does not suggest nor warrant them to be anything more than ingredients of local color. If they are Arabs they will dress in wide burnooses, and in leopard skins if they are blacks. And the "indigènes" do not talk, since they are just objects. And (c), the case in which Africans are riotous because they are savages who do not understand that France, or England, are just trying to help them out. Roaring viciously and cruelly, the leopard-skinned Africans will loot the colonists' sacred neighborhoods, a kind of behavior which calls for justifiable and immediate disciplinary action from the colonists.¹⁷

Although, with an increasing speed beginning in the early 1960's, most African countries have won "independence," the master/slave relationship that existed between these nations and the metropole during the colonial era still persists. For, generally, independence has just meant a strategical replacement of the colonial governors and députés with Africans who had been long-time recipients of colonial education and bourgeois indoctrination and have been consequently modelled into polished lackeys of imperialism. The roles of these lackeys and their "independent" African governments have practically been those of agents or "pimps" through whom the imperialist monopolists

in the metropole continue to exploit and enslave the African masses. This is a sophisticated form of colonialism through African overseers--neo-colonialism.

Just as it was the case in colonial Africa where film was used as a weapon for enhancing colonialism, in "independent" Africa it continues to play the role of an effective weapon for neo-colonialism. And alas, the only remarkable features we could bring up as differences between the two phases of the presence of cinema in Africa, are the expansion, strength and sophistication of the imperialist film industry in the neo-colonial phase which has been achieved through monopoly capitalism. Internationally, film production, film selection and film distribution have become completely monopolized by big film corporations in the USA. With their front, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), and through agents such as the Anglo-American Film Distributors and the two French corporations SECPMA and COMACIO, they distribute films throughout Africa and own cinema houses in most African countries.

Our main concern here would not be so much with the super profits that these imperialist film monopolies reap by distributing seemingly irrelevant and reactionary films to poor African masses. We will concern ourselves with the impact of the ideological and cultural values promoted by these decadent bourgeois films on the African masses, and the African youth in particular. By alienating the masses from Africa's cultural heritage through promotion of foreign and bourgeois life-styles, these films pave the way for both the expansion of markets for consumer goods and the continued

exploitation of African resources. By drawing themes from social historical realities and misrepresenting them on the screen through the mystical-idealist bourgeois world view, these films fill the African masses with false and fragmented concepts of history which alienate them from reality and sow confusion in their minds.¹⁸ By persistently filling the African screens with make-believe Hollywood superstars and sex symbols, and their fantastic superfluous life-styles, the African masses are kept ignorant of the social realities in the metropole where, like in all other class societies, they have oppressed class comrades with whom they could combine common interests and join hands to overthrow their common oppressor, the international capitalist system. Instead, these films fill the African with subjective psychedelic fantasies about life in the metropole.¹⁹ And as for the African youth whose energy should be vital for the African revolution, some of them go so far as adopting names of the Hollywood superstars. In the streets of the African towns one will meet quite a number of Steve McQueens, Shafts, James Bonds, Jim Kellys; and the list goes on and on.

Before we go on to investigate what the African governments, organizations or progressive individuals are doing to correct this negative and appalling state of film in Africa, I find it quite fitting to talk briefly about cinematic comic books, using photography rather than drawings: "Look-reads," which became tremendously popular among semi-literate Africans, for those who can barely read could decipher captions from the graphic photos surrounding the dialogue bubbles. Although this time the accusing finger will be

pointed at the infamous South African regime,²⁰ these "look-reads," with their easier accessibility and minimal prices, have continued to supplement the bourgeois and decadent Hollywood films. Talking about their popularity Stanley Meisler says:

In almost every English speaking town in Africa, young men, most with no more than five years of schooling, sit on the sidewalks and read the weekly picture magazines that chronicle the adventures of Lance Spearman and other heroes like Fearless Fang who is the black facsimile of Tarzan, or the Stranger who is the black Lone Ranger. In Kenya for example the adventures of Lance Spearman have a greater circulation than any of the daily newspapers.

Lance Spearman, the hero of the "look-read" known as Spear magazine in South Africa and African Film in the rest of Africa is aptly described by Stanley Meisler:

Lance Spearman is a nattily dressed detective who sports a straw hat, bow tie and a goatee. He likes Scotch on the rocks, buxom women, El Greco cheroots and fast cars. He uses reverse Karate kicks, his fists and a hand gun to bring down his enemies like Zollo, the Mermolls, and the Countess Scarlett. He is the black James Bond and²¹ the most popular fictional character in Africa today.

It is not difficult to visualize the emasculating effect that millions of African young men who read these "look-reads" can undergo: in diverting them from their actual surroundings and the burning issues in their societies, by saturating their minds with idealistic and fantastic images they turn many young men into social misfits,²² and, quite identically to the decadent Hollywood films, they are formidable weapons of neo-colonial and imperialist interests.

Our brief mention of cine-books in this African film study will be more significant if we can draw the following deductions from it:

- (1) the immense popularity of "look-reads" in Africa (as demonstrated

by the Kenyan example where their circulation surpasses that of daily newspapers), underlines the importance of the visual media in the continent in which illiteracy ranges between seventy and eighty percent, a continent in which the majority of the people are still in an oral level for cultural expression. (2) Taking into account the fact that these "look-reads" reproduce the Hollywood films' imperialist stereotypes, we should on the one hand realize the intensity of the impact of Hollywood films on Africa and on the other hand we should come to terms with the fact that imperialist attacks on the people, although fundamentally coming from the bourgeois classes, can also come in different disguises and from varying strategical angles--a factor exhibited by the fact that these "look-reads" are African produced and distributed.

But most important of all, we should realize the weight and the urgency of the task lying in the hands of the African people to liberate themselves from these menaces. Yet, what are the practical procedures and complications involved, and how much has been accomplished in this task? With what amount of optimism, for example, should we conceive resolutions such as the one made in 1973, at the Third World Film Makers' meeting in Algiers, calling for an immediate introduction of film policies committed to eliminate once and for all films which the foreign monopolies continue to impose on African peoples? What positive effects have we realized, and how much more can we expect from the formations and activities of the two African Film Festivals, The Cinematic Days of Carthage (founded in 1966), and The "FESPACO" of Ouagadougou (founded in 1969)? What potentials do

nationalistic film policies (in cases where they exist) entail and what limitations do they face? To what extent should we be sanguine about the future of African film when we read in a recent issue of the Tanzanian Daily News²³ that the first African Conference on Cinema held in Maputo (formerly Laurenço Marquis) ". . . has accepted Mozambique's proposal to create an organization which will control the importation, production and distribution of films." Last, but not least, what actually is the vehicle for changing African cinema from being the weapon of the reactionary classes to being a tool of progress for the people? Could we, on the other hand, talk about the liberation of African cinema outside the context of the overall socio-economic liberation, or to be more precise, outside of the general class struggle dynamics? Clarifications of these questions will give us much light on the struggles and future of the African film.

Our immediate reaction to the African film-makers' legitimate call to eliminate all foreign films from Africa before we even consider the economic and political processes that such an advocation shall involve, would be a question as to the actual state of the African production of meaningful films that would replace foreign importations. The response would be "encouraging" in francophone Africa, and "discouraging" in anglophone Africa. The reasons for this difference of film situations in the two linguistic zones have been attributed to various socio-historical factors inherent in their relationships with their respective metropolitan patrons. According to Lionel N'Gakane, the exiled South African film-maker, member of the

African National Congress (ANC), the tragic situation of film-making in anglophone Africa originates from the fact that while the French made "Frenchmen" out of their colonized peoples in Africa, the British made "professionals"--teachers, doctors, lawyers,²⁴ who had little to do with popular cultures. Guy Hennebelle on the other hand pointed out the lack of cinematographic culture in anglophone countries resulting from the poor encouragement from England. For example, he noted that the 1962 UNESCO statistics indicated that France had produced 83% of all films made in Africa while England only produced 12%. He also noted the significance of the fact that since the independences in Africa, the London Film School has admitted only twelve African students.²⁵

Whatever other reasons there might be for the poverty of indigenous African cinema in the anglophone zones, the present reality is that francophone African cinema and particularly Senegalese films, lead the way for African cinema (at least qualitatively).²⁶ Franco-phone zone African cinema was born eighteen years ago when the Sene-galese, Paulin Vieyra made Afrique sur Seine. But for a long time African films remained at the stage of blurred images and tentative manipulation of boring subjects until the sudden appearance of a real, great director--the novelist Ousmane Sembene. Starting in 1963 with Songhays, a documentary about the ancient African Empire of Songhay, Sembene, who claims to be a marxist, has made several films, including his two most celebrated works, Mandabi (1968) and Emitai (1971). Guy Hennebelle has characterized him as "the Pope of African cinema" and "the father of Senegalese cinema."²⁷ (See Appendix A for detailed comments on two of his films.)

Along with the Senegalese cinema, leading in both the formal and quantitative aspects of African cinema, we should mention Algeria, whose talented film-makers have produced many "progressive" works since the Algerian revolution, and Tunisia,²⁸ which can at last proclaim progressive film-makers like Ibrahim Babai, Taieb Louhichi, Ferid Boughedir and Abdel-Latiz Ben Ammar, whose films are now addressing themselves to the socio-economic problems of the Tunisian peasants and workers. Individuals like Med Hondo, who Hennebelle describes as the most brilliant African film-maker, has, since his magnificent Soleil O of 1970, produced other commendable works like Les Bicots-Nègres: Vos Voisins and Un Monde à côté, dealing with subjects ranging from French neo-colonialism and the bureaucratic African bourgeoisie to the South African apartheid system. Haile Gerima put Ethiopia on the map with his splendid Harvest 3000 Years of 1974, about life under the feudal regime of the former emperor Haile Selassie. Still holding social commitment as the criterion for scrutiny we could likewise mention some "leftist" African countries such as Guinea, Guiné-Bissau, Mozambique and Tanzania. In the general process of their struggles against Western domination and influence these countries have, to varying extents, endeavored to create national cinemas and have financed the production of their own films. However the state-financed films have always been socially limited in scope, since they inevitably propagandize in favor of the prevailing political systems.

It is true that film-making unlike book-writing, is economically a high overhead industry, and most African film makers have to

struggle painfully to manage one production even at three-year intervals. Yet, when asked what the first preoccupation of the African film-makers is, the Tunisian Ferid Boghedir responded: "Contrairement à ce qu'on pense trop souvent, ce n'est pas la production mais la distribution. Pendant trop longtemps, on nous a leurrés en nous disant que notre problème était de trouver de l'argent et de créer. En fait il est moins difficile de produire un film que de le distribuer."²⁹

We can thus see the legitimacy and dire need for official policies not only to promote film production but more critically to protect and assist them against foreign film corporations which monopolize distribution in Africa. It is true that there are some African countries (especially those with "leftist" governments), which have drawn up such film policies, but the ironical reality is that most African films, and even the best and most successful ones, have been adventurously produced by individual artists from countries without any distinct film policies, apart from general neo-colonial cultural attitudes.

Senegal is a perfect illustration of this category. There is a UNESCO publication on the cultural policy in Senegal written by Mamadou M'Bengue, and although I have not been able to get it I have no cause to suspect that it will be anything in contradiction with Senghor's reactionary Negritude philosophy, since authors of other UNESCO books in the cultural policy series have been sought through government filters. And for a film policy, what we know is that the Senegalese film-makers do not only have to bear much of the costs of their own

productions, but they also face persecution from Senghor's reactionary regime and the menacing problematic monopoly of all the distribution rights by the two foreign firms, SECMA and COMACICO. In 1969, Sembene's Mandabi (Le Mandat) became the first and probably the last film of Sembene to enter Senegalese commercial cinema halls. However, it took Sembene some lengthy discussions with COMACICO who agreed to screen it, presumably because it had won a prize at the 1968 Venice Festival, which convinced them it was a commercial prospect. President Senghor, naturally, is reported to have been quite displeased with it.³⁰ Yet (as I have already pointed out), with names like Ousmane Sembene, Paulin Vieyra, Mahana Traore-Babacar Samb and others, Senegalese cinema is not only the most dynamic and progressive African cinema but actually the most promising voice for the film-makers of the whole continent.

Tanzania (one of the "progressive" African countries), from a general awareness of the potential of mass media for serving socialist aspirations, has persistently given official attention to film. We could start by mentioning the official guidelines assigned to the National Film Censorship Board³¹ (which until the 1968 formation of the Tanzania Film Company (TFC), was the main indication of the government's concern with films):

To ensure that films allowed to be seen . . . do not plague the national policy of socialism, economic development and culture; to promote the local film industries which are specifically intended for our progress and development in various sections of our nation. . . .³²

The next mentionable official move pertaining to film in Tanzania is the 1966 decision by the government to have all film

distribution taken over by the National Development Corporation (NDC). However, as Stephen Arnold has pointed out, this move was motivated by economic rather than ideological reasons.³³ Its practical realization was an interim measure (awaiting the set-up of a distribution apparatus in Tanzania), to which the Anglo-American distributors responded by stopping the supply of films altogether; the other distributors quietly compensated for the 10% levy by a hike on rental charges.

We would not lament too much about the frustrations of this arrangement if we see it rightly, as an unholy pact between the National Corporation and the foreign monopoly corporations to increase profits made from distributing "poisonous" films to the masses. Following persistent outcries from members of the National Executive Committee of TANU³⁴ and the public, to establish a national film industry which would produce films to replace the imperialist films that still monopolize the Tanzanian screens, the Tanzania Film Company (TFC), which since its formation in 1968 had existed only as a policy on paper, got its first Managing Director in 1970 and since then all aspects pertaining to importation, distribution and production of films have been entirely entrusted to it. However, contrary to what might be our expectation (especially after having seen Senegal), the Tanzanian film situation did not automatically fall on a glorious path toward its idealized goals.

Although it is both logical and correct to presume that the roots of this disappointment are much deeper, that they entrench themselves in some soft spaces within the whole political system, our

immediate and legitimate defendant is the TFC. After reading Stephen Arnold's well-documented analysis of the activities of the TFC, one can crystallize out the basic mistakes which it has inherently maintained from the time it was under the National Development Corporation through its marriage to the Tanzania Tourist Corporation (TTC), till its present existence as a parastatal (crown corporation) under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. TFC was designed as a self-capitalising unit which meant that it had to depend on accumulating money from profits made from its share of distribution fees. This led to an inevitable shift of criterion for selection of movies, from being their ideological contents to their commercial prospects. This is illustrated by the case cited by Stephen Arnold in which a TFC spokesman defends their favoritism to Indian film shows on Sundays and public holidays against outraged letters from the public, in the Sunday News of March 31, 1974. As Arnold puts it:

His message was simple: "without Indian films TFC will collapse." . . . Whereas one Indian film would earn over shs. 40,000 in a single day, not a single "socialist" film had ever broken even. . . .³⁵

What a funny culmination of the whole rhetoric about imposition of policies against foreign films which are not compatible with the "socialist aspirations" of Tanzania!

The second basic mistake made by the TFC, which is generally linked with their choice for the self-capitalising way of development, is inherent in their film production strategy. Without taking into account the Tanzanian poverty, the TFC has exhibited extravagance and tendencies toward preference for mere decorative formal aspects and

striving toward international standards³⁶ rather than catering to the local realities. The production of their first and so far only feature film, Fimbo ya Mnyonge (The Poor Man's Cane) which was released for public exhibition in 1976, substantiates this accusation; although the country has the facilities and skilled manpower for processing 16 mm black and white films, TFC did not only shoot Fimbo in colour but later decided to blow up its original 16 mm shots to 35 mm prints, luxuries that need foreign laboratories and expertise. The TFC Managing Director's words in the July 27, 1975 Sunday News do not only implicitly equate TFC to the exploitative western film companies but actually indicate a slow motion in the cinema revolution, so earnestly called for since the 1960's.

Fimbo ya Mnyonge, for example, cost us some 500,000/= to produce. The expense is also one of the reasons why we have to show our films on commercial lines, if we are to keep going, and there are hardly any indications that the fees will be cheaper than is paid for foreign films, at least not for the first five to ten years.³⁷

"A People's Cinema," an unpublished document written by a TFC employee, T. Haxthausen, as a result of a research on the possibilities of a people's cinema in Tanzania, indicates that for the cost of one extravagant 35 mm colour feature film like Fimbo dozens of high quality black and white 16 mm films could be produced.

The only criterion by which the expenses of a production such as Fimbo could be partially excused, would be an exhibition of unquestionable artistic and ideological competence. It is however doubly disappointing to find out that Fimbo falters on this too:

Fimbo shows the oddyssey of Yomba Yomba ("Beggar Beggar") from dissatisfied farmer, to petty swindler and small time capitalist in the city, to bamboozled bumpkin outsmarted by city-born sharpies, to repentant promoter of "socialism" in his home town village after a post-city stay in an ujamaa village.³⁸

While catering to the national policy which encourages people to stay in collectives, ujamaa villages, from both the above description and from its first lengthy press review (Daily News, August 1974), Fimbo promotes a false, secondary contradiction as primary: town people against country people--workers against peasants. The city is represented by witty lumpens. The thousands of innocent, humble, honest, hardworking, but impoverished city workers are not illuminated. On the other hand, the countryside is idealistically presented, totally negating the reality of class conflict between the Kulak farmers and the peasants. A class analysis-centred depiction of a unified mass of peasants and workers against the national bureaucratic bourgeoisie (local agents of imperialism) would definitely not suit the interests of the TFC managers who are a part of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie.

This brings us to a new departure with many reconsiderations. First, we think of three of the foremost African film-makers. Ousmane Sembene, Med Hondo, and Haile Gerima, all from countries (Senegal, Mauritania and Ethiopia respectively) which give little or no assistance to film-making. We think for example of the unsurpassed artistic qualities of the black and white 16 mm Harvest 3000 Years.³⁹ Its review in the Algerian newspaper El Moud Jahl by Moutoud Miaroun ended with a declaration:

Sur la côte ouest, l'Afrique a Sembène Ousmane. Sur le flanc est, elle a désormais un cinéaste de grand talent en la personne d'Haïlé Gérima. (Vendredi 25 juin 1976)

We cannot resist the urge to imagine what would happen to the African film situation, if these individual film-makers would have access to facilities owned by the TFC. And before we continue with such fantasies maybe it will help our insights to determine where really lies the hope for African cinema if we briefly mention Algerian cinema. Here again, contrary to what we would expect from the fact that since the Algerian Revolution all film production and distribution has been entrusted to the ONCIC (L'Office National pour le Commerce et l'Industrie cinématographiques) and L'Office des Actualités, Algerian films have not taken the lead in African cinema revolution. For example, out of the seventeen films that it had produced between 1962 and 1971, fourteen were about the Algerian war of liberation, two on the theme of immigration to France, and one about the Palestinian War, and none has dealt with the question of the national bourgeoisie which has gradually emerged since the war of liberation. On the other hand, film production is not made unnecessarily expensive but it is characterized by unnecessary bureaucratization.⁴⁰

Now we go back to the question: if countries with both film policies and film-making facilities and even pronounced revolutionary aspirations do not really seem to be capable of leading the African cinema revolution, where does the hope for African cinema lie? Who will change African cinema from being a weapon of reactionary classes to be a weapon of the masses?

We arrive at the ultimate conclusion that cultural revolution is part of the class struggle, that the African cinema revolution cannot be brought about by the state bureaucratic machineries because they are external to the social realities of the masses. They might be quantitatively well equipped with facilities for film production but given that fact that real, qualitative social change will be a disruption of their privileged official existence, they will maintain their safety if necessary by making a hundred films on a single nationalist battle won decades back. The African cinema revolution cannot be separated from the African socialist revolution: it cannot be carried out outside the context of the class struggle in Africa. The first prerequisite to revolutionary cinema in Africa, then, is proletarian power. In the meantime part of the struggle is to fight against reactionary cinema produced by western imperialist regimes and by opportunistic pseudo-socialists who are usually propped up by the social imperialists of the USSR and China.

The most recent initiative in "indigenous" African film-making looks on the surface to be consistent with the ideals of Pan-Africanism. Early last year in Maputo (formerly Laurenço Marques, capital of Mozambique), eleven countries signed the Maputo agreement⁴¹ on film (Daily News, February 27, 1977), which aims at setting up an organization which could control the importation, production and distribution of films. The countries represented were Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia, Angola, Guiné-Bissau, Guinea, São Tomé and Principe, Cape Verde, Congo and the Malagasy Republic. Almost all the countries involved in this proposal are "progressive." We must note, however, that Soviet

influence is rampant in most of these countries, and the Soviets are masters at arguing for external forces being crucial for change. This formation of a grand inter-African film policy in place of national film policies which have actually failed to bring about any qualitative change in the African film scene, is a further "external" means by which to bring about "change" (i.e., to frustrate change which would benefit the masses): it is a further externalization of the means of change.⁴²

To conclude: new film policies in Africa and elsewhere in the world have had an impact on the imperialists, but this does not mean that gains have been made for the masses because of this change. The case is almost everywhere the same, a case of national bourgeoisies successfully grabbing from the imperialist pie while the people still go hungry. This observation is obvious and right out of the mouth of the imperialist horse. Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America, said the following:

The American movie industry is part of the underbracing fiscal strength of the United States. The industry returns more than \$450 million every year to the United States as over surplus balance of payments. . . . Some 50 cents out of every dollar spent for the production of films by American companies comes from audiences around the world.

. . . There is competition. In 1974, some 51 countries produced 3500 feature films.

The future of American films abroad is bound up in the struggle to overcome . . . restrictive trade barriers which, like Gothic gargoyles, take many shapes and many forms, such as limiting the number of films we can take in, shrinking the remittance of our earnings, applying to our films uneconomic or discriminatory commercial practices, draining off our earnings through excessive taxation or other levies. The ingenuity of government bureaucrats is infinite--and deadly. So the battle goes on.⁴³

Where film in Africa goes from here is probably not to be decided by any existing policies, which in the countries surveyed have either maintained imperialist film or have developed neo-colonial bourgeois film in the name of "Revolution." It is more likely to be advanced by devoted independent artists. As truly revolutionary parties form, genuinely progressive film-makers will find homes. It is possible that artists like Ousmane Sembene and Haile Gerima will be among them, but it is more probable that the great cineasts of the African future have yet to turn to the profession.

NOTES

CHAPTER IV

¹ Assembling of images or camera shots--an innovation elucidated in the brilliant theories and practice of the Soviet film pioneer of the 1920's to 1940's, Sergei Eisenstein.

² Stephen Arnold, "Film in Tanzania, I: Literary and Ideological Aspects," UMMA, 6 (1976), p. 52.

³ Quoted by Stephen Arnold, *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴ L'Afrique littéraire et artistique reports on the major franco-phone--including Maghreb--film-makers and their works. The same periodical has a regular column on African cinema. Information on anglophone and lusophone African cinema is scattered and no systematic studies exist.

⁵ Allan Hill, "African Film and Film-Makers," Essence, July 1978, p. 23.

⁶ Stephen Arnold's Chapter II in The Cinema in Tanzania: The Treadmill beside the Road of Self-Reliance (Dar-es-Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1979) documents how Tanzania Film Company's lust for western-type music is an aspect of conscious neo-colonial sabotage of the young film industry.

⁷ Japanese cinema has many of the qualities which are cited as "African" here: leisurely pace, repetition, lingering close-ups of mundane objects and activities. It is significant that though Japan is highly industrialised, it ruptured with feudalism only a little over a century ago when penetrated by the West. Therefore what we call "African" might in a longer essay with different emphasis, be subsumed by some larger category such as "non-Western."

⁸ See the report of the "Third World" film-makers' meeting of December 1973 at Algiers (document from Professor Gerima).

⁹ This term refers to the African zones that came under British colonization, as opposed to French colonization, from which we get the term "francophone" Africa.

¹⁰ From "Smashing the Myth of the Noble Savage"--an article sent to me in photocopy by the Ethiopian film-maker and professor at Howard University. The only identity I can make from the copy is that it was produced by the Ifriguyan Film Collective. Professor Gerima has not responded to my request for identification.

¹¹ See L.A. Notcutt and G.C. Latham, eds., The African and the Cinema: An Account of the Work of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment during the Period March 1935 to May 1937 (London: The Edinburgh House Press, 1937).

¹² From "Smashing the Myth of the Noble Savage" (refer to "Methodology and Procedure," 2).

¹³ "Smashing the Myth. . .," op. cit. (the document bears no pagination).

¹⁴ Stephen Arnold, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁵ "Smashing the Myth. . .," op. cit.

¹⁶ Guy Hennebelle, "Les Cinémas africains en 1972," L'Afrique Littéraire et Artistique, 20, p. 281.

¹⁷ Guy Hennebelle, op. cit., p. 282.

¹⁸ Shaft in Africa is a good example of films that fit in this category, as it mystifies and romanticizes the social historical reality of the actual French illegal importation of workers from contemporary Africa.

¹⁹ While these films try to give the African masses the impression that all the people in the metropole live like James Bond, Steve McQueen or Raquel Welch, they, on the other hand, try to tell the metropole audiences that all Africans are savages, natives who live and play tamtams in the jungles and have nothing in common with the ordinary metropole man.

²⁰ These "Look-reads" are written, edited and published in South Africa. The white publishers make separate editions for the white-ruled South Africa and for the independent African countries, avoiding and erasing any reference to South African owners in the copies sold in the independent black countries. By camouflaging their publications as "Drum Publications of Nigeria" or "Drum Publications of East Africa," these editions have enjoyed unhindered circulation in the whole of anglophone Africa, including the most anti-South Africa countries such as Tanzania.

²¹ Stanley Meisler, "Look-Reads," Africa Report, 14 (1969), p. 80.

²² "Look-reads," like the violence-laden Hollywood films, have been criticized in various African countries as factors contributing to an increase of crime and hooliganism in the African cities.

²³ See Daily News (Tanzania), Thursday February 24, 1977.

²⁴ André Paquet, "The 'Fespaco' of Ouagadougou: Towards Unity in African Cinema," Cinéaste, 6.

²⁵ See Guy Hennebelle, op. cit., p. 264. Both Hennebelle et N'Gakane rightly point out that the tendency inherent in the anglo-phone African governments to concentrate on television developments rather than cinema. This raises issues we cannot explore here.

²⁶ Countries like Egypt have had cinema for a long time but the quality of the films produced does not contribute to liberation of African cinema or African masses.

²⁷ Marie-Claire Leroy, "Africa's Film Festival: Screening in Upper Volta's Newly Nationalised Cinema," Africa Report, 15, p. 27. We should not, however, attribute individual merits of film-makers such as Sembene to Senegal as a nation. Sembene does not only incur most of the expenses for his movies but most of them are extremely unacceptable by Senghor's regime in Senegal. Discussion of the individual versus the government as the source of film progress in Africa follows.

²⁸ Monique Hennebelle, "La Nouvelle Vague du cinéma tunisien," L'Afrique Littéraire et Artistique, 25 (1973), p. 80.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Robert Mortimer, "Engaged Film-Making for a New Society," Africa Report, 14 (1970), p. 28.

³¹ The Tanzania mainland Board Office receives its powers from the Cinematography Ordinance of 1936, revised since 1967 to cater to the socialist development policies.

³² L.A. Mbuguni, The Cultural Policy in the United Republic of Tanzania (Paris: UNESCO Press, 1974), pp. 44-45.

³³ See Stephen Arnold, The Cinema in Tanzania, op. cit., Chapter II, "History and Political Economy."

³⁴ Tanganyika African National Union, now Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM)--the ruling political party.

³⁵ Stephen Arnold, op. cit., Chapter II.

³⁶ In 1974, Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier as guests of TFC, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were invited to give their advice on the establishment of the Tanzanian film industry. Why didn't TFC invite Ousmane Sembene or any other African film-maker instead? The TFC bureaucracy wants contacts with Hollywood.

³⁷ See Sunday News (Tanzania), 27 July 1975.

³⁸ See Stephen Arnold, op. cit., Chapter II.

³⁹ I had a discussion with Haile Gerima about the making of his film when he showed it at the October 1976 Third World Literature Symposium held at the University of Alberta. Not only did he minimize the costs by making it in 16 mm black and white prints but he also applied minimum technical expertise. All the actors (except one whom he had hired cheaply from Addis Ababa) were peasants from his native Gondar province.

⁴⁰ See Guy Hennebelle, op. cit., p. 105.

⁴¹ Soon after the Maputo Agreement, Cuban film-makers began working in Tanzania, a key participant in the African Association for Cinema Cooperation. Nowhere mentioned in the agreement, Cuba is a silent partner controlled by the USSR. Thus the marxist language of the Agreements must be read as deception. (See Appendix B, below, and note that most of the countries involved in the Maputo Agreements have strong soviet influences).

⁴² The Last Grave at Dimbaza, a film about the misery of blacks in South Africa, is a favorite of the soviet-influenced African National Congress (ANC), of South Africa. In Dimbaza, blacks are portrayed as apathetic and overwhelmingly helpless, against the racist regime, which, reminiscent of the portrayal of the Nazi propaganda parades in The Triumph of the Will, is portrayed with exaggerated military capacities. After watching the racists' war planes, fascist military parades, housewives being trained to use guns, the film ends with a scene in Soweto (the black township), where open graves are readily awaiting victims of the

apartheid system. The final message from Dimbaza is that only a superpower (USSR) can save the Africans from the oppression.

⁴³ "The Current State of the American Film Industry," American Cinematographer, December 1975, p. 1412.

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*The photocopies that I possess do not indicate pagination, etc.

APPENDIX A

COMMENTS ON TWO FILMS BY SEMBENE OUSMANE:

MANDABI AND CEDDO

Mandabi (Le Mandat, 1968), was made in French and Wolof versions.

Reflecting the orality of African traditions, the Wolof version runs 1 hour 45' as opposed to the French 1 hour 30'; had Sembene not been strict with the actors, the Wolof version would have been much longer.

Mandabi is the story of Dieng, for two years out of work, with two wives and seven children. He receives a money order from his nephew who works in France. Illiterate, he neither can read the amount of money nor the accompanying letter instructing him to put 80% of the money in the bank for the sender and to apportion the rest according to strict orders. Dieng, his wives, relatives and neighbors suddenly believe wealth is theirs. A picaresque journey through bureaucracy and other sycophantic stations of beggars, etc., relieves Dieng of all the money. Quotidian events and objects such as shaving and a red brassiere receive repeated, lingering attention which makes them symbolical of appearances of wealth in the midst of want.

Mandabi is the only major film of Ousmane to be shown in Senegal. Its gala première in Dakar was attended by President Senghor. It has not been banned probably because it presents an entire society as dishonest and greedy. Furthermore, the only source of livelihood is an emigré to France who can manage to send 25,000 CFA (ca \$100) per month

home from his street sweeper's salary, about as much as an average Senegalese can hope to earn in a year. Nothing is revealed of the misery of African workers in France, and in essence the film does propaganda against Africans and for the French. It proposes no solutions. A pessimistic comedy, it is, par excellence, a revisionist film. The professed marxism of its author is nowhere evident.

A brief synopsis in French follows, taken from Paulin Vieyra's Ousmane Sembène, cinéaste (1972):

1--Dieng se fait coiffer sur une place publique.

2--Le facteur apporte un avis de mandat à Ibrahima Dieng, ne le trouve pas chez lui et remet l'avis à ses femmes.

3--Les femmes recevant l'avis l'utilisent comme une monnaie d'échange. Elles achètent à crédit, empruntent et préparent un bon repas à Dieng, qui se régale sans rien demander. Puis après la sieste, elles avisen Dieng de l'existence du mandat; celui-ci se met en route pour aller le toucher après avoir protesté auprès de ses femmes de ce qu'elles aient commencé d'utiliser le crédit, en ouvrant ce mandat sans l'en avoir avisé.

4--Dieng à la poste pour toucher le mandat. Il se fait lire la lettre de son neveu qui accompagne le mandat. Il ne peut encore toucher le mandat faute de pièces d'identité. L'employé de poste lui indique la marche à suivre pour pouvoir obtenir ces pièces.

5--M'Baye, homme d'affaires, vient montrer la maison de Dieng à un éventuel acquéreur. Dieng le propriétaire n'est pas là et M'Baye s'entretient avec l'une de ses femmes.

6--Dieng se présente au commissariat de police pour sa carte d'identité. On lui indique là aussi la démarche à suivre. "Allez

d'abord à la mairie pour un extrait de naissance."

7--Au petit matin, la maison de Dieng--Le Serigne en visite.

Il vient emprunter de l'argent. Dieng le fait asseoir et lui offre le petit déjeuner. Comme il n'a pas encore encaissé le mandat, le Serigne s'en va, ainsi que Madiagne, également venu emprunter de l'argent. Avant le départ de Madiagne, Dieng fait donner à celui-ci trois kilogs de riz alors que ses femmes s'y opposent. Dieng part de chez lui pour aller s'occuper de ses affaires, et en passant, il s'arrête chez le boutiquier.

8--Dieng s'en va à l'hôtel de ville pour essayer d'obtenir son extrait de naissance. Les employés le renvoient parce qu'il est incapable de leur dire sa date de naissance. Mais avant l'arrivée de Dieng, ceux-ci parlent de leurs affaires, de la façon dont ils pourront se procurer de l'argent.

La façon dont Dieng est renvoyé par les employés, met ceux qui attendent hors d'eux. Ils protestent. Le planton de la mairie prend Dieng à part et lui recommande de trouver quelqu'un de bien placé pour lui arranger son affaire. Dieng, en retournant chez lui, croit voir son neveu dans la rue; ce n'est pas lui, mais il décide d'aller le voir chez lui.

Dieng chez son neveu Amath. Celui-ci lui donne quelques menues monnaies et lui fait un chèque de 1000 francs. Son neveu l'accompagne à la Mairie, et le met en relation avec un ami qui va se charger de lui procurer son extrait de naissance. En le quittant pour le remercier de son intervention, Dieng invite Amath à la prière. Debout dans la rue, ils prient et d'autres personnes se joignent à eux dont

un agent de police qui était sur le point de verbaliser et qu'on oblige à se joindre à la prière.

9--Dieng allant à la banque est abordé par une mendiante qui lui demande l'aumône. Dieng lui donne 20 francs et continue son chemin. A la banque, il est abordé par un jeune homme qui se propose de l'aider à toucher son chèque puisqu'il n'a pas de pièce d'identité. A la sortie, le jeune homme lui demande 300 francs sur 1000 francs, prix pour sa commission. Dieng s'exécute. Sur le chemin du retour, la même mendiante l'accoste à nouveau, Dieng la reconnaît et furieux lui refuse l'aumône.

10--Chez Dieng, le porteur d'eau demande son dû. Les femmes disent n'avoir pas encore touché le mandat. Des quémandeuses dont Madiagne et le Serigne se présentent à nouveau. Les femmes font le compte de ce qu'elles ont déjà dépensé.

M'Baye, l'homme d'affaires, vient à son tour s'enquérir de ce qui se passe chez Dieng qu'il n'arrive pas à joindre. Sur ces entrefaites, la soeur de Dieng arrive.

11--Elle vient pour toucher sa part du mandat envoyé par son fils. Dieng lui dit que c'est une question de jours, qu'elle aura bientôt son argent. Aram, l'une des femmes de Dieng, lui donne à gager un collier en or. Dieng s'en va à la boutique de M'Barka pour donner le bijou en gage. Il en voudrait 5000 francs, mais n'obtient que 2000 francs qu'il accepte. En allant chez lui, Dieng rencontre Serigne qui lui demande de lui prêter 5000 francs. Dieng lui redit qu'il n'a pas d'argent. Serigne pense qu'il est sous l'influence de ses femmes et l'exhorté à ne pas se laisser influencer par ses femmes.

12--La sœur de Dieng repart dans son village accompagnée par Dieng et ses épouses. Le cortège passe devant Serigne, Maïssa et Madiagne, les éternels solliciteurs. La soeur prend le car, mais promet de revenir sous peu pour toucher le reste de son argent.

13--Dieng retourne chercher ses photos d'identité. Le photographe lui dit que ses photos sont ratées et qu'elles sont à refaire. Dieng ne veut pas payer encore une fois pour les refaire. Une discussion vive s'ensuit, puis des coups sont échangés. Dieng est blessé. Après son départ, les photographes, l'apprenti et son patron boivent un verre de vin rouge. L'apprenti dit à son patron qu'un jour ils vont se faire prendre à ce jeu. Car en vérité, ils ne font aucune photo et encaissent l'argent des clients.

Dieng arrive chez lui et ses femmes ameutent le quartier par leurs cris. Elles lancent le bruit que Dieng a été agressé et qu'on lui a volé l'argent du mandat. Alors dans le quartier les gens viennent par solidarité apporter quelque chose aux Dieng.

Les gens du quartier viennent s'inquiéter de la santé de Dieng en apportant des vivres. Dieng, remis de ses émotions, est furieux contre ses épouses qui ont lancé le bruit du vol. "Qu'est-ce que les gens vont dire quand ils sauront la vérité," dit-il.

Ses femmes lui disent d'affirmer que ce sont elles qui ont lancé ce bruit. Le facteur arrive à son tour pour annoncer que le mandat est encore à la poste.

Dieng chez M'Barka le boutiquier pour emprunter de l'argent. Ce dernier lui annonce que quelqu'un veut acheter sa maison. Dieng se met en colère et se bat avec M'Barka. Tout le quartier est en effervescence.

M'Baye, l'homme d'affaires, arrive et sépare les antagonistes, puis en partant, il dit à Dieng de venir le voir pour son mandat.

14--Dieng chez M'Baye. Puis celui-ci l'amène au commissariat de police pour qu'il lui signe une procuration. Dieng s'en va. Un jour après, Dieng revient voir M'Baye pour toucher son argent. Celui-ci lui dit avoir été volé. Il donne cinquante kilogs de riz en lui promettant de le rembourser prochainement. Dieng chez lui est accablé. Ses femmes le soutiennent, récupèrent le sac de riz qu'il avait laissé dehors et que des ménagères étaient en train de vider. Dieng raconte sa mésaventure en se promettant d'être "aussi" loup parmi les loups. La soeur arrive pour réclamer son argent. Et le facteur apporte le réconfort en disant qu'ils vont changer tout cela. Mais Dieng est incrédule.

CEDDO. 1977. 2 hours. Written and directed by Ousmane Sembene. Banned in Senegal. (The following information is from the programme of Senegal: Fifteen Years of an African Cinema, 1962-1977, a retrospective organized and circulated by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, under the direction of Larry Kardish, Associate Curator, Department of Film, February 2-March 5, 1978.)

"Ceddo is a film of reflections. The film presents facts and events from an epoch stretching over hundreds of years and which is still with us today. Reflections on the appropriation of power. Anticipations of the coups d'état of the Africa of today. Reflections on the guilt of the former feudal classes and the bourgeoisie of today.

Reflections over the responsibility--direct or indirect--of religion for the alienation of the African--even today. Reflections over the slave trade where the toys and trinkets of today were objects of exchange. Reflections on the spirituality of the African." Ousmane Sembène.

Like Glauber Rocha's *TERRA EM TRANSE* (Brazil) and Nagisa Oshima's *THE CEREMONY* (Japan), Sembène's recent film *CEDDO* is an uncompromising epic film about the author's society, its history and culture. Although it assumes a knowledge about customs and behavior, it is also a work which informs an audience of these aspects. Unlike the Rocha and Oshima film it is set in the past but that past is purposefully not clearly defined. But, in its non-specificity and its "flash forwards" it shares with the other two films a fluid and expressive view of time. *CEDDO* begins simply--at its base a straightforward story of a "political kidnapping." However, there are also, as integral factors, discussions, authors' "comments" and the depiction of rituals and ceremonies; all of which enrich the work in original and significant ways.

The ostensible setting of the film is at a "time" when Islam (introduced to Senegal in the 9th Century) was being spread even further (by both sword and politics) when Christianity was being introduced, when slave-trading not only between the peoples of Africa but with the Europeans was rife, and when an inheritance of thousands of years, animism or developed spiritualism was being seriously threatened. In a fight for "religious supremacy," the weapons (and barter) were arms, alcohol and man himself.

In a particular area the royal family and government dignitaries are converted by the Iman into Islam. However, the Ceddo refuses and plans an effective guerrilla action to prevent a forced conversion from spiritualism. The act itself and the reaction of the various parties and its outcome are the subjects of CEDDO.

Writing from Paris, Richard Dembo comments that Sembène's earlier films, MENDABI, LA NOIRE DE... and XALA all present the conflicts and problems of modern Africa in their materiality. However, with CEDDO Sembène has become more philosophical, political; in CEDDO Sembène pierces appearance to get at the roots... CEDDO is about a spiritual colonialism...

APPENDIX B

DRAFT CHARTER OF THE AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR CINEMA COOPERATION

(Known as "The Maputo Agreement")

AND OTHER MAPUTO DOCUMENTS

(Documents distributed at the Maputo meetings, obtained from
Haile Gerima, participant.)

DRAFT CHARTER

OF AN AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR CINEMA COOPERATION

The Signatory States to the present Charter:

The People's Republic of Angola
The Republic of Cape Verde
The People's Republic of Congo
The Republic of Guinea
The Republic of Guiné-Bissau
The Democratic Republic of Madagascar
The People's Republic of Mozambique
The Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Principe
The United Republic of Tanzania
The Republic of Zambia

Considering their common political, economic and socio-cultural
objectives within the framework of the Charter of the Organisation of
African Unity (OAU) and the identity of their objectives for the total
liberation of their peoples;

Determined progressively and definitively to free themselves from
a position of economic dependence in the field of the film industry;

Conscious of the importance and urgency of establishing a common strategy for the production, acquisition, importation and distribution of films in order to develop a truly revolutionary cinema;

Desirous of developing full cooperation between themselves on equal and mutual advantage, with the aim of promoting the cultural and social consciousness of their peoples through the cinema;

Convinced of the necessity of destroying the domination, exploitation and cultural and ideological infiltration which imperialism exercises through the cinema in their respective States;

Animated by the will to liberate their peoples from imperialist alienation and oppression in the political, economic and socio-cultural domains;

Agree on the following:

Article 1

The African Association for Cinema Cooperation is hereby established (A.A.C.C.), hereinafter referred to as the "Association."

Article 2

The African Association for Cinema Cooperation is an international organisation with a legal personality and an administrative and financial autonomy.

Article 3

The headquarters of the Association shall be in Maputo, capital of the People's Republic of Mozambique.

Article 4

The objectives of the Association are:

- (a) To devise a common policy for the production, acquisition, importation and distribution of films;
- (b) To establish a community for film importation and distribution embracing the combined cinema circuits of member States.
- (c) To coordinate the development of film production and contribute to its promotion, encourage the creation or development of basic infrastructures, promote the distribution and exhibition of films produced and co-produced by member States within and outside the Association;
- (d) To initiate, encourage and support activities aimed at developing political and cultural consciousness of the peoples through the cinema within and between member States, without prejudice to initiatives of the national cinema organisations;
- (e) To ensure the training and development of technical cadres;
- (f) To cooperate with, participate in or join other international organisations with the same or similar objectives;

(g) To establish a common fund for the realisation of these objectives.

Article 5

The Association shall have the following organs:

- (a) The Conference;
- (b) The Secretariat.

Article 6

(a) The Conference shall be composed of member States and shall be the supreme authority of the Association.

(b) Each member State shall have the right to one vote.

Article 7

(a) The Conference shall meet under the chairmanship of the President.

(b) The Presidency of the Conference shall be assumed in rotation by each member State of the Association.

(c) The President shall hold office for a period of one year.

Article 8

The Conference shall meet in ordinary session once a year. It shall be convened in extraordinary session by the President on his own

iniative or at the request of two-thirds of the member States.

Article 9

(a) The quorum of the Conference shall be two-thirds of the member States.

(b) Decisions shall be taken by a simple majority. In the case of a tie the President has the casting vote. In the case of amendments to this Charter, dissolution of the Association, admission or expulsion of members, there shall be a two-thirds majority.

Article 10

The Conference shall:

- (a) Determine the general policies of the Association and lay down directives for the functioning of the executive organs;
- (b) Examine the annual accounts, the programme of activities and approve the budget;
- (c) Authorise the acquisition and transfer of ownership of its fixed property;
- (d) Appoint the members of the Secretariat;
- (e) Approve proposals for the admission and expulsion of members;
- (f) Create, control and dissolve agencies, commissions or departments of the Association;

- (g) Amend this Charter, adopt and alter the Rules of the Association;
- (h) Approve the dissolution of the Association.

Article 11

The President shall:

- (a) Preside at meetings of the Conference;
- (b) Represent the Association and delegate some of his powers to the Executive Secretary;
- (c) Approve the agenda for meetings of the Conference.

Article 12

- (a) The Secretariat shall include an Executive Secretary, a treasurer and a chartered accountant.
- (b) The chief executive of the Secretariat shall be the Executive Secretary.

Article 13

The Secretariat shall:

- (a) Execute the decisions of the Conference;
- (b) Direct the activities of the Association;
- (c) Convene, prepare and organise the Conference sessions;
- (d) Present a report of activities to the Conference;

- (e) Present a draft annual budget to the Conference;
- (f) Survey film markets;
- (g) Prepare information on film purchases for the Association and member States;
- (h) Acquire and dispose of films and their respective rights;
- (i) Undertake economic, technical and financial studies and prepare documents and files relating to the importation, purchase and distribution of films;
- (j) Study the conditions for the production and exploitation of films by member States;
- (k) Establish the modes of payment between member States;
- (l) Determine specialist priorities, levels and programmes of professional training without prejudice to programmes established in member States.

Article 14

The Association shall be open to all OAU member States who subscribe to the principles set out in the preamble and agree to be bound by the present Charter and Rules.

Article 15

The working languages of the Association shall be English, French and Portuguese.

Article 16

The present Charter shall come into force for Signatories after the deposit of their instruments of ratification with the government of the People's Republic of Mozambique.

In Witness whereof, the undersigned, being duly authorised by
respective governments, have signed this Charter at

on the day of nineteen hundred
and seventy-seven.

PLAN OF IMMEDIATE ACTION
APPROVED IN PLENARY SESSION

The delegations of the following countries:

The People's Republic of Angola
The Republic of Cape Verde
The People's Republic of the Congo
The Republic of Guinea
The Republic of Guiné-Bissau
The Democratic Republic of Madagascar
The People's Republic of Mozambique
The Democratic Republic of S. Tomé and Principe
The United Republic of Tanzania
The Republic of Zambia

present at the first African Conference on Film Cooperation, held in Maputo, capital of the People's Republic of Mozambique, from 20-24 February 1977:

Aware of the importance of this Conference for the opening of a new front in the combat against imperialism;

Conscious of the urgent need for a unity of principles and action;

Agree to establish a Provisional Secretariat for film cooperation among the respective countries until a permanent structure is created.

The Secretariat shall include representatives from the Democratic Republic of Madagascar, the People's Republic of Mozambique and the United Republic of Tanzania, and shall have its headquarters in Maputo.

With the assistance of the Mozambican National Cinema Institute it shall have the following functions:

- A--1. To prepare a detailed dossier on the situation of the cinema in the participating countries for the Ministerial meeting which will be held to sign and ratify the draft Charter of the African Association for Cinema Cooperation.
2. To study the initial financial requirements of the Association.
3. To draw up a draft set of Rules for the Association.
4. To study the needs of the Association in the establishment of regional agencies.
5. To survey in detail the techniques and costs of subtitling and dubbing.

- B--1. To collect information on the possibilities of film acquisition either directly from suppliers or from the national organisations participating in the first Conference, and to circulate this information to all the participating organisations.
2. To collect and file copies of letters relating to film acquisition either between organisations and suppliers or between organisations.
3. To establish a list of theatrical and non-theatrical films held by each organisation represented in this Conference and to circulate it.
4. To publish a quarterly information bulletin.
5. To organise a rotating African film festival, to be based primarily on films produced by member States.

REPORT FROM WORKING GROUP NO. 1

APPROVED IN PLENARY SESSION

The working group was convened by the Zambian delegation and attended by the delegates from Angola, Cape Verde, Guiné-Bissau, Mozambique, S. Tomé and Principe, and Tanzania. It met to study the ways in which the following points would function:

- (a) Selection and censorship of the films acquired through the Association;
- (b) Exchange of national film productions.

It unanimously agreed to present the following document:

SELECTION AND CENSORSHIP

The Association will select films taking into account the progressive nature of member countries. Thus, films will always be chosen according to the principle of the revolutionary transformation of man within African society. It will give priority to films which educate, inform and transmit the values defended by the revolutionary parties of our peoples. On the other hand, it will reject outright films which transmit racist, colonialist and imperialist concepts. In the same way it will reject outright films which promote the decadent values of the bourgeoisie, in particular pornography, gratuitous violence and drugs and alcoholism.

The Association will always remember the internationalist nature of our struggle for the complete liberation of man and will try to propagate this principle through the cinema by bringing to our peoples films which show the struggle of oppressed peoples and classes all over the world.

Considering the principles outlined above, the working group recommends:

1. The creation of an organ within the Association with the following functions:
 - (a) to consolidate the information provided by each member country on their film requirements within the Association circuit;
 - (b) to bring together all information about films available on the market before signing contracts to buy the exhibition rights;
 - (c) to distribute this information, if possible with video-cassettes, to all member countries to enable them to make their selection;
 - (d) to acquire, as far as possible, the distribution and exhibition rights on a collective basis;
 - (e) to try to establish, at an appropriate stage, an agency in Europe which, due to its proximity to the major film markets and festivals, could provide valuable information to the Association, help to resolve the transport problems and provide training facilities for distribution staff from the member countries.

2. The preparation of a list of films to be presented to this conference which, after being approved, would form the basis for the first acquisitions of the Association and which would particularly highlight progressive African films.
3. The censorship commissions of each country should continue to function, and a common censorship commission should not be created.
4. Inasmuch as it is not predicted that the proposed Association will be able immediately to supply the total market requirements of each country, the national structures will be able to establish bilateral relationships with the Association either to satisfy their own needs or to cede to the Association films they have acquired on their own behalf.

EXCHANGE OF NATIONAL PRODUCTIONS

The working group recommends:

1. That a list of films from each country be prepared including shorts and feature films in 35 mm and 16 mm, to be included in the future circuit of the Association.
2. That the proposed Association should ensure the integration of future productions of member countries into its circuit, taking responsibility for the necessary linguistic adaptations.
3. The organisation of Festivals and Film Weeks in the member countries with films about the struggle for national liberation of all peoples.
4. Exchange of newsreels produced in the member countries.

REPORT FROM WORKING GROUP NO. 2

APPROVED IN PLENARY SESSION

At 15.00 hours today, 22 February 1977, working group 2 met.

Its brief was outlined in the third plenary session of the African Conference on Film Cooperation, that is to discuss the problems related to film production, professional training centres and linguistic adaptation. The Angolan delegate was the group convener, with the participation of delegates from the Republics of Cape Verde, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, Tanzania and Zambia.

The working group adopted the approach of dividing up the proposals into separate subsections. The following recommendations were approved after all the delegates had spoken:

ON FILM PRODUCTION

1. In order to start taking advantage of the technical infrastructure, not only for film production but also to promote and stimulate national productions, the Association should make a survey of equipment and personnel with the aim of establishing a common infrastructure, not only for film production but also to provide the necessary administration of professional training. The Mozambican and Zambian delegates stated that their countries are already capable of carrying out this recommendation.

2. Either the Provisional Secretariat, or any other organ that the Conference may decide to create, should look into the technical resources and training requirements of each country involved in the Association. It should present concrete proposals to be considered by the next Conference as to how such resources should be used.
3. The countries taking part in this Conference should be asked to collaborate in a film co-production system in order to reduce costs.

The Zambian delegate offered to make available the technical structures his country has, to enable effective collaboration in accordance with the spirit of these recommendations.

The working group also felt that priority should be given to the production of 16 mm films and the reduction of 35 mm films to 16 mm. It was felt that this would lead to their greater and better dissemination throughout the rural areas, thereby contributing to the raising of the cultural and ideological level of the masses.

It was also recommended that a mechanism be established for the distribution of films in rural areas, and it was noted that a start in this direction has already been made in some member countries. Films which have educational or social development themes should predominate.

ON PROFESSIONAL TRAINING CENTRES

Interest was expressed in the professional training of technicians within the various participant countries' structures. Rational planning

to meet the needs of all the countries involved was suggested.

It was further recommended that the Association should undertake to organise regular seminars and workshops in various technical skills in cinematography with a view to:

1. Facilitating exchange of experience among countries of the Association.
2. Improving the content and artistic aspects of films produced in the respective member countries.

ON LINGUISTIC ADAPTATION

The working group looked at the pros and cons of film dubbing and subtitling. It took into account the aim of the Conference to adopt a common policy in relation to importation and distribution. Because this was considered to be of urgent and immediate interest it was recommended that both systems be adopted.

It was also recommended that a Commission be created which would present a detailed study of equipment costs for dubbing and subtitling. This should be submitted to the next Conference for its consideration.

SUMMARY

1. The first African Conference on Film Cooperation met in Maputo, capital of the People's Republic of Mozambique, from 21-24 February 1977.

The Conference was attended by representatives of the following countries: People's Republic of Angola, Republic of Cape Verde, People's Republic of the Congo, Republic of Guinea, Republic of Guiné-Bissau, Democratic Republic of Madagascar, People's Republic of Mozambique, Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, United Republic of Tanzania and the Republic of Zambia.

2. The speech inaugurating the Conference was given by His Excellency the Minister of Information of the People's Republic of Mozambique, Jorge Rebelo. The Minister of Information outlined the reasons and objectives that had led Mozambique to propose the convening of this Conference, emphasising the deep identity of revolutionary principles that united the peoples, parties and governments represented there.

The oppressive nature of imperialist cinema and its fundamentally negative ideological and cultural effects were also analysed in the opening speech, and it was pointed out that the majority of films seen in Africa today are of this type. The central objective of the Conference was therefore to lay the foundations that would enable the countries represented there to destroy domination, exploitation and

cultural and ideological infiltration that imperialism achieves through the cinema.

In his speech, the Minister of Information of the People's Republic of Mozambique referred to the need to join battle and proposed, as an instrument of struggle, the creation of an international African organisation comprising the countries represented at the Conference and others who wished to join. This organisation would enable the establishment of a common front in the fields of importation, distribution and film production, thus making it possible for the member countries to impose correct commercial relationships, reject relationships of dependency on imperialism and encourage the establishment of popular cinema.

3. The Conference reaffirmed these principles in adopting the speech of His Excellency the Minister of Information of the People's Republic of Mozambique by acclamation as an official base document for its work.

4. The Conference continued with the presentation of reports on the situation of the cinema in the participating countries.

The reports showed the existence of a large number of common problems, and basically identical attempts to resolve them. They also told of the successes and failures of the various systems in use.

Among the aspects common to the majority of countries, the dependency of the various exhibition and production sectors on foreign distribution companies, mainly American, British, French and Portuguese, could be highlighted. This dependency and the consequent difficulty, or impossibility, of pre-selection of films to be shown, led to

the establishment of censorship with the aim of lessening the negative effects of imperialist ideological aggression.

The common difficulty of changing the habits of audiences whose tastes had been perverted during colonial occupation was also emphasised.

An equally general problem is the location of cinemas in urban centres, which makes them almost inaccessible to the broad masses.

As attempts to solve the problems, experiences of nationalisation of film importation and distribution, of the parallel existence of private exhibition circuits and state enterprises, or as in the case of the Republic of Guinea of nationalisation of the whole cinema sector, were referred to and studied.

5. Some of the countries participating in the Conference then presented concrete proposals for confronting this combination of common situations.

After debate and amplification of the proposals in plenary session, their complementary nature was established and a drafting committee elected which had as one of its tasks the uniting of the various proposals into a single draft proposing the creation of an inter-statal organisation for cinema cooperation.

The work of the drafting committee resulted in a "Draft Charter of an African Association for Cinema Cooperation."

In this document, which was both a constitutive text and the Statutes of the Association, the common political, economic and socio-cultural objectives of the participating countries were taken into consideration.

The draft preamble affirmed the determination of these countries to struggle for their freedom from the dependency to which they are subject in the field of cinema.

The preamble also affirmed the importance and urgency of a common strategy for the governments represented in the Conference for the development of revolutionary cinema.

The text prepared by the drafting committee was then presented to the Conference plenary session, which approved it unanimously.

6. The Conference also adopted two recommendations. According to the first, the draft should be sent in the three official Conference languages to the governments of the participating countries for study and possible corrections.

The second recommendation was that the Charter should be signed at a ministerial-level meeting, to take place within three to six months.

7. The countries represented at the Conference, convinced of the need to put into practice immediately the unity of principles and action that had been established in the draft Charter, also approved an "Immediate Plan of Action" in which they agreed to establish a Provisional Secretariat for Cinema Cooperation pending the creation of permanent structures.

8. The Conference also approved unanimously that this Secretariat should comprise representatives of the Democratic Republic of Madagascar, the People's Republic of Mozambique and the United Republic of Tanzania, with headquarters in Maputo and assisted by the National Cinema Institute of Mozambique. Its tasks are, on the one hand, technical

documentary and legal assistance to the future Association; and on the other to provide member countries with information on the international film market and the availability of resources of each participating country.

The Provisional Secretariat was also given responsibility for the publication of a quarterly information bulletin.

The Conference also decided that the Provisional Secretariat should organise a film festival, mainly based on films produced by member countries.

9. During the Conference the delegates divided into two working groups to discuss concrete problems relating to the selection and censorship of films to be shown in the different countries, exchange of productions, centres for professional training, linguistic adaptation and production.

The two working groups produced important documents that were taken to the plenary session, improved during a full debate, and approved.

According to the first, the criteria for the selection of films to be acquired must have as a basis the need for the revolutionary transformation of society and African man. With this objective films which promote imperialist and bourgeois values must be rejected.

The creation of a special organisation to aid the acquisition of films on the best conditions was also proposed.

Finally, various forms of interchange of national productions between member countries were suggested.

The second document began by recommending that the Provisional Secretariat should inventory technical and human resources for film

production, to be able to make an overall plan for their usage.

It referred to the need to encourage 16 mm production, as the most suitable format for spreading cinema to the rural areas.

The document also referred to the advantages of training cadres within member countries.

The problem of linguistic adaptation was also analysed. Both dubbing and subtitling were approved in principle, and a commission to study equipment costs of each system was recommended. This study should subsequently be presented to the Conference.

10. At the closing session a resume of the work achieved was made, and the main documents approved were read. The Conference applauded them at length.

The head of the Republic of Guinea delegation and ambassador of his country to the People's Republic of Mozambique, Fodé Bereté, thanked the Mozambican government in the name of the delegations participating in the Conference for the initiative it had taken to convene it and the hospitality with which it had welcomed the delegations. He underlined the urgency of a common front on the basis of the principles outlined during the work, and congratulated the Conference participants on the way the work had developed.

His Excellency the Minister of Information of the People's Republic of Mozambique, who presided at the closing session, gave an important speech in which he re-emphasised the need for the cinema to take on the dynamic of class struggle, congratulating the Conference for having achieved its central objective: the opening of a new fighting front against imperialism.

11. The Conference took place in an atmosphere of comradeship and militant solidarity which was developed and consolidated during the debates, in a clear reaffirmation of the identity of the principles and objectives of the peoples, parties and governments of the participating countries.

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